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Making Myanmar: Colonial Burma and popular Western culture

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RESEARCH PAPER

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Research Paper

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Colonial Burma and popular Western culture

(Revised version)

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'Making Myanmar: Colonial Burma and popular Western culture'

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Burma—land of mystery, of gilded Buddhas and almond-eyed dancing girls, of patient elephants piling teak, of shaven, yellow-robed priests, smouldering incense, and the silver tinkle of temple bells. The jungle—teeming with tropical life and potential death.

Otis Adelbert Kline
'Tam, Son of the Tiger'
Weird Tales, June-December 1931.

About the Author

Andrew Selth

Andrew Selth is an Adjunct Professor at the Griffith Asia Institute. He has been studying international security issues and Asian affairs for almost 50 years, as a diplomat, strategic intelligence analyst and research scholar. Between 1973 and 1986 he was posted to the Australian missions in Rangoon, Seoul and Wellington. He later served in the Defence Intelligence Organisation and Office of National Assessments. He has been an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University (ANU), a Visiting Fellow at the ANU's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, a Chevening Scholar at St Antony's College, Oxford University, an Australian Research Council Fellow at Griffith University and a Harold White Fellow at the National Library of Australia. Dr Selth has written ten books and more than 50 peer-reviewed works, most of them about Myanmar (Burma). He has also contributed to the public debate on Myanmar through numerous articles, blogs and news commentaries, 97 of which have been collected in his forthcoming book, *Interpreting Myanmar*.

Books by the Author

1986 *The Terrorist Threat to Diplomacy: An Australian Perspective*
1988 *Against Every Human Law: The Terrorist Threat to Diplomacy*
1996 *Transforming the Tatmadaw: The Burmese Armed Forces Since 1988*
2002 *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*
2012 *Burma (Myanmar) since the 1988 Uprising: A Select Bibliography*
2015 *Burma (Myanmar) since the 1988 Uprising: A Select Bibliography* (2nd edition)
2017 *Burma, Kipling and Western Music: The Riff from Mandalay*
2018 *Burma (Myanmar) since the 1988 Uprising: A Select Bibliography* (3rd edition)
2019 *Secrets and Power in Myanmar: Intelligence and the Fall of General Khin Nyunt*
2020 *Interpreting Myanmar: A Decade of Analysis* (forthcoming)

Contents

Abstract

Over the centuries, images of Burma in the Western imagination have been remarkably consistent. At the broadest level, they have emphasised Burma's remoteness, strangeness and harshness, or offered a much more idealised, romantic view of the country and its people. Within these two broad schools there have been a number of recurring motifs that have helped confirm the idea of Burma's dualistic nature, and contributed to its mixed reputation. It has been depicted as a rugged but picturesque tropical land of jungles, wild animals, trained elephants, pagodas, Buddhist monks, rural villagers, pretty girls and primitive 'hill tribes'. Such tropes too have proven to be surprisingly resilient, the result in large part of their repeated use in the many vehicles of popular culture found in the West. By providing memorable, if selective and commodified, glimpses of colonial Burma and the Burmese, they have helped to reinforce stereotypes and strengthen clichés, many of which survive to the present day.

This research paper surveys a wide variety of references to Burma in the popular culture of Great Britain, although to illustrate particular points it occasionally cites examples from other Western countries, notably the United States. For heuristic purposes, the paper is divided into seven sections. They look in turn at Burma's exotic reputation, its physical geography, Burmese society, the role of Burmese women, and the economies and cultures of both the colony and metropole. The paper also looks at descriptions of Burma during and after the Second World War, to note continuities and contrasts with the main colonial period. Finally, it briefly relates all these trends to more contemporary developments.

The paper concludes that the most enduring mental pictures of a country are formed not from a few key sources, however influential they may seem, but from the combination of many, often subtle, influences, accumulated over time. The perceptions of Burma found in the West, particularly since the 19th century, have been derived in part from high culture, such as fine art and literature, but arguably the many and varied vehicles of popular culture have provided much more powerful vectors. For, despite their lowly social status and often ephemeral nature, they were highly influential social artefacts that portrayed Burma and the Burmese people in ways that helped them become part of an imaginative inner world. It was a distorted picture, characterized by inaccurate information, misleading stereotypes and naïve assumptions. However, the very crudity of the messages conveyed by movies, pulp fiction, comic books, postcards, trading cards, posters, advertisements and other such sources helped to ensure their impact, and durability.

Preface

> It is related of a member of Parliament that some years ago he met at dinner a civilian from British Burma, home on leave. The conversation turned on that country, and the legislator remarked, "Burma—oh, yes, Burma. I had a cousin who was out there for some time, but he always called it Bermuda".
>
> James George Scott
> *Burma: As It Was, As It Is, and As It Will Be* (1886)

Ever since I was posted to the Australian embassy in Rangoon (as Yangon was then called) in 1974, I have been intrigued by the ways in which Burma has been viewed and described by foreigners.[1] Not only were my diplomatic colleagues at the time a rather mixed bunch, with a wide range of presumptions, perceptions and prejudices, but I found that Western visitors who came to the country usually brought with them their own peculiar sets of assumptions and beliefs. Most had been derived from pretty unreliable sources, notably such vehicles of popular culture as feature movies, songs and adventure stories.[2] It was also interesting to note that, even after their exposure to the harsh realities of General Ne Win's isolationist, socialist Burma, most of these visitors seemed determined to cling to romantic images of the country that they had acquired before their arrival. British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson was not the first Western politician to see Burma through Rudyard Kipling's ballad 'Mandalay', just the first to do so publicly.[3] It was almost as if the ideal of a 'golden land' of pagodas and pretty girls outweighed anything that they actually saw or heard, or was described to them by those with first-hand experience and a greater understanding of contemporary developments.

After returning to Australia in 1976, I began to collect books and ephemera related to Burma that appeared to offer insights into how it was viewed in the West, both during the colonial period and since. As regards the latter category, I initially focussed my attention on pulp fiction, illustrated magazines and postcards, but I later extended these interests to include such artefacts as comic books, graphic novels, trading cards, banknotes, postage stamps, military medals and matchbox labels. These interests later prompted a number of short articles about Burma and popular Western culture, most of which were published on the *New Mandala* and *Interpreter* blogs, and in the *Nikkei Asian Review*. One appeared on the *Tea Circle* blog. These articles gave a little background on each genre of collectibles, but more importantly drew some broad conclusions about the way in which such items reflected and encouraged particular notions of Burma in the imagination of people living in the West. I also looked in greater detail at the impact that Western movies and Western music had on popular perceptions of Burma, mainly during the colonial period.[4] All these works are listed in the bibliography at the end of this paper.

Conducting research for those publications helped to clarify the picture for me, and they were great fun to write, but they lacked a broader context. To understand the full impact of popular culture on Western perceptions of Burma I felt I needed to widen my perspective and look at the bigger picture. I was keen to discover how all these vehicles of popular and commercial culture, often the only visible manifestations of Burma in the daily lives of Western populations, combined to imprint particular images of the country and its people on the public mind, and then through repetition to reinforce them. How was it, for example, that to most people in Great Britain, the United States (US) and elsewhere, colonial Burma tended always to be seen in terms of tropical jungles, wild animals, trained elephants, precious stones, gilded pagodas, Buddhist monks, paddy fields, pretty girls and colourful 'hill tribes'.[5] These stereotypical images recur in almost every description of Burma (in English, at least) that one encounters from the 15th century through to the present day. They still constitute the mainstay of coffee table books, travelogues, tourist brochures and promotional films.

Of course, it can be argued that such images arose all the time because they actually reflected life in Burma. Even now, almost 70% of the Burmese population live in rural districts. Nearly 45% of Burma's total agricultural output is rice, much of it produced on small farms. Burma is still a major supplier of rubies, sapphires and jade. The country is almost 90% Theravada Buddhist, with about 450,000 men and boys in yellow robes at any one time.[6] As any visitor can attest, there are pagodas scattered all over the countryside. Burmese women have a well-deserved reputation for being charming and attractive. The country's natural environment, while now sadly despoiled, still has the power to impress through its beauty and variety. However, Burma (or Myanmar as it is now officially known) has long been struggling with a wide range of complex problems that, if considered sympathetically by outsiders, would reveal a much darker side.[7] By almost every measure, the Burmese people have suffered centuries of hardship, mismanagement and abuse. Yet, the polemics of more recent activists aside, these issues do not seem to be taken into account by those in the West who are employed to paint pictures of Burma for public consumption.

In approaching this project, I was conscious that I was tackling a vast subject. In almost every field I explored, much more remained to be studied, and much more needed to be said. I found, as Albert Einstein reportedly had before me, that 'the more I learn the more I realise how much I don't know'.[8] Yet, I had to start somewhere, hence this research paper. It is intended as an exploratory survey of the literature, and of various artefacts of popular culture, firstly to illustrate the breadth and depth of the subject, and then to draw some tentative conclusions. They in turn prompt a number of necessarily brief observations about such weighty matters as imperialism, orientalism and exoticism. Much more remains to be done. It is my hope that, if I am unable to pursue this subject at greater depth in the future, then someone else will pick up the baton and do so. For there is a fascinating and enlightening story to be told about the way that popular culture has both reflected and informed Western attitudes towards Burma over the centuries.

In this regard, it would also be interesting to investigate how popular perceptions of Burma in the West have affected the formulation of state policy, particularly after the abortive pro-democracy uprising in 1988, when the international community began to take a much more serious interest in Burma and its seemingly intractable political, social and economic problems. For, in various ways, the stereotypes formed in the past are still alive and well, and arguably can be seen reflected in various statements made and actions taken by members of both national governments and international organisations. The same can be said about a number of Western-based activist groups, notwithstanding their usually high ideals and good intentions. If members of the international community are even aware of this fact, it does not seem to be a matter for concern for them. However, it is keenly felt by many Burmese officials and citizens, and for many years has strengthened their scepticism — indeed, at times, cynicism — regarding Western efforts to influence political developments in the country and to take advantage of the economic opportunities they offer.[9]

In this research paper, I have tried to let the main actors describe Burma in their own words, not just for greater accuracy but also because only they can fully convey their perceptions, passions and prejudices. Needless to say, I do not necessarily share any of the views expressed. I have also provided comprehensive references. This is mainly to support quotations cited, statements made and opinions expressed, as is customary in these academic exercises. I have also done so to assist those interested in pursuing any of the issues raised and examining them more closely. In addition, I have included some endnotes in the hope of stimulating wider interest in popular culture and encouraging the collection, preservation and display of Burma-related ephemera, much of which is being lost due to a failure to appreciate its historical and cultural significance. Those readers who do not like generous references can just skip over them. They may also care to consider the story told about the musician Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. After the first performance of Mozart's opera singspiel *Entfuhrung aus dem Serail* ('The Abduction from the Seraglio') in Vienna in 1782, Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II is reputed to have said: 'Too many notes, dear Mozart, too many notes'. The composer's reported reply was: 'Just as many as necessary, Your Majesty'.[10]

This monograph has gone through several iterations, changing as I have delved deeper into the subject, discovered new illustrative examples that seemed worth citing, received helpful advice from readers, and thought more deeply about certain issues. The first version was posted online in May 2020 by the Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) at the City University of Hong Kong, in the SEARC's series of working papers.[11] An expanded version followed a few months later, and was posted online by the Griffith Asia Institute (GAI) as

one of its new series of research papers.[12] This version of the GAI paper reflects further revisions, and contains some additional material. Also, an edited and much shorter version has been submitted to an academic journal, with the aim of reaching out to a wider audience and encouraging further debate on the matters raised by all these publications. If accepted, the article will probably be published next year or in 2022.

Due to the restrictions on travel and personal contacts imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper draws heavily on my own resources, notably my private library and collections of Burma-related ephemera. However, there are a number of people who deserve my thanks for helping in its preparation. First and foremost is my wife Pattie, who contributes more to these projects than can be recorded here. David Steinberg, formerly of Georgetown University and still the doyen of modern Burma studies, was generous with his time and advice, and I am very grateful. Thanks are also due to Mark Thompson, Tom Patton and other members of the SEARC for their encouragement and support when the paper was in its early stages. Ian Holliday, from the University of Hong Kong, and Don Greenlees from the University of Melbourne both raised some interesting ideas for me to consider, should I decide to take this project further. I am grateful, as always, to the Director and staff of the Griffith Asia Institute at Griffith University, my academic home since I retired from government service in 2006. In particular, I should like to thank Jill Moriarty, who has worked her magic on successive versions of my manuscript, and Meegan Thorley, who has helped carry it through the production process, at a difficult time for the institute and the university.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to all those gloriously named bibliophiles, philatelists, deltiologists, numismatists, virtuosos, discophiles, cartophilists, philluminists, phalerists, notaphilists, scutelliphilists, pannapictagraphists and others who, over the past 45 years, have helped me to collect many of the primary source materials for this study.

Brisbane
October 2020

1. Introduction

> Lotus–land! The Silken East! Land of the Peacock! Beautiful Burma! What enchanting pictures are conjured up as our thoughts dally with these epithets! Burma, or, as the people would pronounce it, Bur-*mah*, is indeed a land of charms.
>
> Walter Grainge White
> *The Sea Gypsies of Malaya* (1922)

Burma's modern history has been one of continual, and often dramatic, change. Since 1824, when Great Britain opened its 65-year campaign of conquest and annexation, the country has been wracked by four major conflicts and dozens of 'small' wars.[13] It has experienced almost every kind of government, from an absolute monarchy through various forms of colonial administration, a parliamentary system and different military regimes, to the current 'disciplined democracy'.[14] As the country has changed, so have its economic fortunes. Also, set within its colonial-era boundaries, Burma is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, a major factor in recurring social and religious tensions.[15] Yet, for all this flux and diversity, popular perceptions of Burma in the West have been remarkably consistent. The mental pictures of the country formed in Britain, continental Europe, North America and the so-called 'white settler colonies' from the 15th century onwards seemed to take root in the public consciousness and flourish there.[16] Even when more information about Burma was available and Western audiences became more worldly and sophisticated, these perceptions were hard to shift. Many survive to the present day.

These enduring images developed over many years and in many ways. Memoirs and official reports played a part, as did the intellectual products of social elites, such as literature and fine art. However, a more potent source of impressions about Burma in Western countries was the vehicles of popular culture, notably newspapers and mass entertainments, such as songs, plays and movies, as staged in drawing rooms, music halls and theatres.[17] This broad category can be extended to include a wide range of cultural artefacts often dismissed as ephemera or colourful collectibles, such as pulp fiction, illustrated magazines, comic books, wall posters, magic lantern slides, stereo viewing cards, postcards and trading cards. To an extent still unrecognised by many academic observers, these manifestations of popular and commercial culture, together with ethnographical displays and *objets de curiosite* exhibited in public venues, complemented the pictures painted by the mainstream media.[18] By providing memorable, if selective and commodified, glimpses of Burma and the Burmese, they helped to reinforce stereotypes and strengthen cliches about their subjects throughout the Western world.[19]

By surveying such sources, it is possible to identify a number of persistent patterns and themes that have characterised popular perceptions of Burma over the centuries. At the broadest level, they reveal two approaches. The first has emphasised Burma's remoteness, strangeness and harshness, while the second offered a much more idealised, romantic view of the country and its people. At times, the two schools were combined, with Burma being presented in terms of stark contrasts, between the good and the bad, the soft and the hard, the light and the dark. They were seen as two sides of the same coin. Considered together, however, they offered vivid pictures of Burma that even now live in the minds of many Westerners. Within these two broad themes there were also a number of recurring motifs that, in their own ways, were emblematic of the country's exotic Eastern appeal and helped to confirm the idea of Burma's dualistic nature, contributing in turn to its mixed reputation. These tropes too have proven to be surprisingly consistent and resilient, although inevitably coffee table books and tourist literature have favoured the quaint and picturesque over other perspectives.[20] More recently, Burma's darker side has been exposed in countless news stories, but the net effect has been that the country has long been presented as a 'fabulous fiction'.[21]

Given the wide range of factors contributing to enduring images of Burma in the West, it may help to break down these pictures into their main elements and, by citing representative examples, identify some of the sources that have contributed to their creation, impact and durability. For heuristic purposes, these elements can be listed under seven headings: Burma's exotic reputation, its physical geography, Britain's impact on traditional Burmese society, the role of Burmese women, and aspects of the economies and cultures of both the colony and metropole. Finally, it is worth looking briefly at descriptions of the country during and after the Second World War, to note continuities and contrasts with the colonial period.[22] For the conflict in the China-Burma-India (CBI) theatre from 1942 to 1945 not only thrust Burma into the consciousness of millions of people in the West, but it revived and reinforced many old images of the country.[23] These were periodically refreshed by references to Burma and the Burmese in the news media and commercial sphere, including in the modern era.

In describing how Burma has come to be viewed, under all these headings, emphasis will be given to sources drawn from the popular culture of Great Britain but, albeit to a lesser extent, other parts of the world have reflected similar patterns.

2. Exotic Burma

> This is Burma, and it will be quite unlike any land you know about.
>
> Rudyard Kipling
> *From Sea to Sea and Other Sketches* (1899)

The baseline for popular perceptions of Burma as a strange and exciting place was established early in contacts between the West and the 'mysterious Orient'.[24] As Kim Phillips has noted, however, in the records of those contacts 'reliable information had to contend with rumour, exaggeration and outright fiction'.[25] This problem continued to arise throughout the colonial period and can still be found in modern Burma studies.

From its 'discovery' by Western adventurers and traders in the 15th century, Burma tended to be portrayed in sensational terms.[26] For example, in his monumental four volume history *Decades of Asia* the Portuguese scholar Joao de Barros cited a 'widespread if palpably ridiculous story' that the inhabitants of the Mon kingdom of Pegu in Lower Burma were descended from the sexual union of a woman and a dog, who were the sole survivors of a Chinese junk that had been shipwrecked on that coast.[27] The woman bore children with whom she had more offspring, thus populating the land. Barros suggested that the original act of bestiality accounted for the 'fact' that Burmese women were quite attractive, while the men were not. It was also said to explain why, 'in the act of copulation, they seek to imitate dogs'.[28] As Charles Boxer has written:

> Although somewhat sceptical of this fable, Barros offers the hardly less fanciful alternative explanation that the Peguans were descended from Jews exiled in the time of King Solomon.[29]

In this version of the Pegu origin myth, in which Barros included the inhabitants of Arakan in western Burma, he described the exiles as *degredados*, or criminals. The Burmese were thus doubly damned in contemporary Western eyes. If they were not an unnatural species, they were the descendants of exiled Jewish convicts.

According to the British historian I.A. MacGregor, Barros enjoyed royal patronage and had access to a wide range of written and oral sources. He was 'keen to paint a true picture of the East'.[30] However, by recounting these colourful stories, which were quoted in Portuguese and Spanish literature until at least the end of the 16th century, Barros ensured that Burma was included in the 'long-standing tradition identifying Asia as a land of strange births, curious customs and marvellous creatures'.[31]

Other early accounts of Burma may have been based on first-hand experience, but they were often no less dramatic. In their ship's logs and private journals, explorers and merchants emphasized the sensational and the shocking, such as Burma's reputedly fabulous wealth.[32] Travelers never tired of describing the country's shrines 'filled with images of massy gold and gems'.[33] One merchant from Bologna who visited Burma in 1505 wrote that the king of Pegu, in Lower Burma:

> wears more rubies on him than the value of a very large city, and he wears them on all his toes. And on his legs he wears certain great rings of gold, all full of the most beautiful rubies; also his arms and ears are full. [34]

Ralph Fitch, the first Englishman to visit Burma, in 1586, was also impressed by the king of Pegu's 'treasure wonderfull rich':

> He hath houses full of golde and silver, and bringeth in often, but spendeth very little, and hath the mines of rubies and saphires, and spinelles.[35]

A French account, published in Calcutta in 1789, described the Burmese practice of offering 'immense riches' to pagodas, making them the 'richest treasuries in the world' (provided they were not robbed).[36] Precious stones were said to be so abundant in the country that Burmese warriors used rubies as 'bullets' in their blowguns and embedded them under their skin before battle to make themselves invulnerable.[37]

While sometimes dismissed as mere travelers' tales, such stories were given wide circulation and were accepted as accurate by many in the West.

Another topic much remarked upon by early visitors to Burma was its inhabitants' sexual habits. There were reports, for example, that Burmese women went about 'in almost complete nudity to entice the men and to keep them away from sodomy'.[38] Other travellers, like the Dutchman Jan Huyghen van Linschoten in the 16th century, described the Burmese custom of offering Western visitors women as 'temporary wives', for their amusement and comfort.[39] In 1795, the British envoy Michael Symes wrote that:

> The lower class of Burmans makes no scruple of selling their daughters, and even their wives, to foreigners, who come to pass a temporary residence among them. It reflects no disgrace on any of the parties, and the woman is not dishonoured by the connection.[40]

The idea of readily available Burmese women was a potent one that kept reappearing in Western books and letters. In the 1826 edition of the popular British guide *The Modern Traveller*, for example, it was stated that:

> Unfortunately, however, for the perpetuity of conjugal felicity, in no country, perhaps, is the marriage contract regarded with so little respect, or maintained with so little propriety, as in Birmah.[41]

Other Europeans described what they saw as the promiscuity of Burmese women. After spending two years in the Burmese capital of Ava, for example, Thomas Trant wrote in 1827 that 'Chastity, in the sense we understand the word, is but little known'.[42] Seventy years later, the British tourist Gwendolen Trench Gascoigne hinted at the uninhibited behaviour of Burmese women when she wrote that 'Utterly unlike their miserable Mahomedan and Hindoo sisters, they enjoy absolute liberty — a liberty of which, if rumour prove true, they make ample use'.[43] In 1914, Burmese girls were described by a British observer as 'very impulsive, full of passion'. He continued: 'Love is a very serious matter, and they are not trained in restraint'.[44]

Burmese men were not spared this kind of attention. The Venetian Nicolo di Conti, for example, wrote after a visit to Pegu around 1435 that the local men inserted small bells under the skin of their penises 'to satisfy the wantonness of the women'. He added that:

> The members of some men stretch way down between their legs so that when they walk they ring out and may be heard. [45]

A similar custom in Siam (later Thailand) was believed to be derived from the Burmese. Indeed, the practice was associated so closely with Burma that, when adopted by the Chinese in the 16th century, it was known as *Mian ling*, or 'Burmese bells'.[46] The Florentine merchant Francesco Carletti, who circumnavigated the globe between 1594 and 1602, claimed that the use of penis inserts was ordered by the 'Queen of Pegu', not only to satisfy Burmese women but also to discourage 'the practicing of venery in illicit parts of the body even with men'.[47] That subject too kept appearing in early European accounts of Burma. Barros, for example, stated in the 1563 volume of his history that Burmese and Siamese penis bells were a 'remedy against the unspeakable sin against nature'.[48] Ralph Fitch believed they were invented so that:

> … they should not abuse the male sexe. For in times past all those Countries were so given to that Villanie that they were very scarce of people'.[49]

In 1727, the Scottish adventurer Alexander Hamilton suggested that Burmese men were 'addicted to sodomy'.[50]

Until the colonial era, the topos of 'Eastern sodomy' often appeared in Western writings about Burma, usually to highlight the country's 'bizarre' social customs and 'un-Christian' decadence.[51]

Westerners were also fascinated by Burma's elephants. In his *Travels*, for example, Marco Polo recounted how, during Kublai Khan's invasion of the country in 1277, Burmese war elephants were used to frighten the Mongol cavalry.[52] In the 15th century, the Genovese Hieronimo di Santo Stefano claimed that the king of Pegu owned more than 10,000 elephants.[53] Nicolo di Conti went further, describing how these animals could be fitted with 'castles' (*howdah*) 'which may carrie eyghte or tenne men with Speares and Shields, or Bowes, or Crossebows'.[54] Visitors to Burma also remarked on the reverence shown to white elephants. According to Cesar Fedrici of Venice, who visited Pegu in the 16th century:

> This King amongst all his other Titles, is called The King of the white Elephants, and it is reported, that if this King knew any other King that had any of these white Elephants, and would not send them unto him, that he would hazard his whole Kingdome to conquere them.[55]

Writing in 1882 under the pseudonym 'Shway Yoe', the British civil servant James George Scott recorded that one of the Burmese monarch's formal titles was 'Lord of the Celestial Elephant'. Albino specimens were still accorded enormous respect:

> Thus the possession of an undoubted white elephant stands as a sign and symbol of universal sovereignty; and every Burmese king longed for the capture of such a treasure during his reign as a token that his legitimate royalty is recognised by the unseen powers.[56]

During the Second World War, elephants were employed by both the Japanese and the Allies, the feats of these remarkable animals capturing the imagination of millions in the West.[57] This fascination continued after the war, when two books by a veteran British elephant handler became best-sellers.[58]

Even now, Burma is associated in many minds with elephants hauling teak logs, and there are occasionally reports of elephants carrying stores for Burmese soldiers and the insurgents fighting them, in the country's seemingly endless civil wars.[59] The last military ruler of Burma, Senior General Than Shwe, kept four white elephants in the new capital of Naypyidaw, believing that they legitimised his authoritarian rule.[60]

Burma did not just boast elephants. It was the most biologically diverse country in mainland Southeast Asia, teeming with other wild animals, beautiful birds and insect life. It was also the home to numerous species of plants unknown to botanists and horticulturists in Europe and America. This rich store of fauna and flora attracted the attention of 'sportsmen', ornithologists and plant hunters keen to take home evidence of their travels in the Burmese wilderness. A number wrote books about their adventures, adding to the colony's reputation as a natural wonderland awaiting the attention of 'civilised' white men armed with high-powered rifles, fishing rods and garden tools.[61] This subject was also of interest for another reason. As Jonathan Saha has written;

> According to imperial writings, the Burmese were too close to animals, both physically and emotionally. It was claimed that some Burmese people had innate connections to animals, notably elephant drivers with their elephants. British writers were also intrigued but disgusted by what they deemed to be inappropriate interactions with animals, recounting apocryphal tales of women breast-feeding orphaned non-human mammals.[62]

For example, in 1834 a British journal reported the case of a Burmese woman who had volunteered to nurse a 'perfectly white monkey'.[63] In 1882, J.G. Scott described a sacred white elephant that was 'suckled by women' in its youth.[64] A German visitor to Upper Burma wrote in 1886 that, due to the high status accorded to such creatures, Burmese women considered it an honour to nurse small white elephants.[65]

To Western audiences, particularly in Britain, such accounts appeared to provide insights into the nature of a country that was foreign in every sense of the word.

As contacts grew, and Burma came to be visited more often by traders, officials and missionaries, memoirs and travelogues grew in range and number. Particularly after the fall of Mandalay in 1885, tourists too began to publish descriptions of their travels. Thomas Cook opened an office in Rangoon in 1891 and began promoting visits to this 'charming' and 'little explored' country, a journey made easier by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.[66] Each year, Cook's issued a *Burma Pamphlet* which was 'circulated throughout the world in order to give information concerning the province to intending visitors'.[67] Descriptions of Burma flowing from this heightened level of interest usually focused on the unusual and unfamiliar. As one visitor wrote:

> Burma combines so much: the glory of the East; the mystery of the unknown, in its strange tribes and races as yet but half understood, even by those who have studied them most; the fascination of nature untamed; and the comfort of travelling under British rule.[68]

As Burma became better known, publications about it became more comprehensive, accurate and reflective. However, whether they promoted the country as savage, romantic, or both, most works continued to focus on the exotic and strange, and to encourage outlandish ideas which were eagerly consumed by credulous audiences 'back home' in the West.

One recurring subject in Western publications was the colonial government's efforts to stamp out armed bandits, or *dacoits*. Following the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885, remnants of the defeated Burmese army, criminal gangs and other disaffected elements roamed the countryside, waging guerrilla warfare against the British and threatening the local population. Some dacoits claimed that they were patriots, trying to reinstate the monarchy and protect the Buddhist religion that it had sponsored.[69] In some places, they were supported by Buddhist monks (*pongyis*). Denied any political status by the colonial government, however, dacoits were the target of a long and bitter 'pacification' campaign by soldiers and military policemen.[70] Through stories and pictures in journals like *Navy and Army Illustrated*, *The London Illustrated News* and *The Graphic*, dacoits soon entered the consciousness of Western audiences.[71] Public interest was occasionally piqued by reports in the press about the execution and decapitation of dacoits by members of the British forces, a few instances of which were so disturbing that they prompted questions in parliament and even official enquiries.[72] As late as the 1950s, British authors could write that Burma was 'notorious always for its dacoits', confident that their Western readers would understand the reference.[73]

One reason why dacoits made such a strong impression on Western populations was that they often featured in popular entertainments. In the 1887 musical review *The Blue Bells of Scotland*, for example, the two heroes travel to Burma where they fight off a horde of dacoits.[74] The same year, Rudyard Kipling's fictional Private Mulvaney fought Burmese dacoits in 'The Taking of Lungtungpen'.[75] They were further immortalised in his 1889 narrative poem 'The Ballad of Boh Dah Thone', which began:

> Boh Da Thone was a warrior bold:
> His sword and rifle were bossed with gold,
>
> And the Peacock Banner his henchmen bore
> Was stiff with bullion, but stiffer with gore.
>
> He shot at the strong and he slashed at the weak,
> From the Salween scrub to the Chindwin teak.[76]

A few years earlier, Henry Moore, formerly assistant editor of the *Rangoon Gazette*, had won a prize for his popular adventure story *The Dacoit's Treasure*.[77] In *The Mystery of Dr Fu Manchu*, published in 1913, the eponymous criminal genius (who was active in Burma) employed dacoits as his personal bodyguard and used them to attack his enemies, including in London.[78] In a 1927 novel by James Gorman, Burmese dacoits were described as 'frightfully wily and clever', but 'utter scoundrels'.[79] In a 1938 pulp fiction story titled 'Claws of the Corpse Cult', dacoits were described – wrongly – as followers of the Hindu goddess Kali, who had 'a temple devoted to her worship in Upper Burma'.[80] The 1946 children's story *Drummer Boy of Burma* described a youngster's contribution to the defence of an isolated colonial garrison threatened by 'them blood-thirsty

devils'.[81] A band of dacoits also made an appearance in the 1955 movie *Escape to Burma* but, like much else in that film, they were hard to take seriously.[82]

Another subject considered worthy of public comment was Burma's cuisine. Most foreigners described it as a cross between Indian, Chinese and Thai traditions, and dismissed its claims to unique status.[83] A few identified particular dishes that they liked, but most were more critical. For example, in 1563, Joao de Barros wrote that the people of Lower Burma 'eat anything and refuse almost nothing'.[84] Vincenzo Sangermano, an Italian Roman Catholic priest and missionary who worked in Burma from 1783 to 1806 wrote in his memoir (published in 1833) that:

> In every part of the empire, excepting Rangoon, where, on account of the concourse of strangers, it is at all times allowed to sell venison, pork, fowls and fish, the food is of the worst quality and to a European is absolutely disgusting.[85]

In 1857, an American Baptist missionary noted the Burmese taste for 'strange selections', such as horseflesh, snakes, rats, cats, lizards, grubs and ants.[86] Jonathan Titcomb, the first Anglican bishop of Rangoon, wrote in 1880 that the Burmese were 'simply omnivorous: they will eat anything, from elephants and snakes even to rats'.[87] The big game hunters Fitz William Pollok and W.S. Thom made a similar observation, adding snails to the list of reported Burmese comestibles.[88] Even the more common curries, soups and rice dishes came in for criticism, incorporating as they did 'every herb and the leaves of every tree, provided they are not positively venomous'.[89]

Such attitudes clearly reflected different Western tastes and practices, but they were probably also influenced by encounters with a spicy side dish made with fermented fish or shrimp paste, known as *ngapi*. According to J.G. Scott;

> there are few articles of food which meet with more energetic denunciation than the favourite Burman condiment, ngapi, which means literally pressed fish.[90]

Sangermano described it as 'half putrid fish'.[91] Pollok described it as a 'horrid decoction of rotten fish pounded with chillies, garlic, and other condiments'.[92] Another British visitor considered it 'the rankest filth', 'perfectly unbearable to the European'.[93] The American Laura Carson considered it 'putrid fish which is largely used as a food'.[94] Rudyard Kipling was told that *ngapi* was 'fish pickled when it ought to have been buried long ago'.[95] In 1904, the missionary Henry Cochrane described how European travellers in Burma were often subjected to the 'odour rank and unbearable' of 'this vile stuff'.[96] So notorious did *ngapi* become that it even featured in the popular literature of the period. In James Gorman's 1927 novel *The Road to Mandalay*, for example, an Old Burma Hand told a newcomer to the country that his two pet hates were dacoits and *ngapi*. On being asked what the latter was, he replied: 'What isn't ngapi would be easier to answer … It's really something like fish paste in an active state of decay'. The Old Hand said he had tasted it once, but 'it needed bravery, I can tell you'.[97]

Even after three Anglo-Burmese Wars, however, and the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886 (which gave Britain control over the entire country), few people in the West knew much about it. If they had heard its name at all, it was most likely in connection with biological rarities like Burma's 'hairy family', first encountered by a British delegation visiting the royal court in 1826. The diplomats met an entertainer suffering from congenital hypertrichosis ('werewolf syndrome'), or an abnormal amount of body hair.[98] Twenty-five years later, a second delegation met the entertainer's daughter and her child, both suffering from the same ailment.[99] Photographs of this family were published in magazines and issued as postcards in Europe and the US. Another subject of popular interest was the Burmese dwarf Smaun Sing Hpoo, who was described on contemporary postcards as 'the smallest, most perfectly formed man in the world'.[100] On circus posters he was called 'The only existing miniature man'.[101] Yet another source of fascination in the West was the 'giraffe-neck' Padaung women of eastern Burma, who wore brass rings to elongate their necks.[102] All these people caused sensations in Western Europe and the US, where they were displayed in circuses and sideshows.

The American impresario P.T. Barnum was very taken with Burma, exhibiting both its 'hairy family' and groups of Padaung women. In 1883, he acquired a 'rare' and 'sacred' white elephant from Burma named Toung

Talaung.[103] Despite its questionable credentials (it was neither white nor Burmese), it was a drawcard for his 'Greatest Show on Earth', which toured America and Europe.[104] By 1884, Barnum and his business partner James Bailey had also recruited a Burmese dwarf named Moung Bouk, two Burmese women and their children, and two Buddhist monks. Along with other 'living human curiosities', they were listed as members of the circus's 'Museum Department'. The show also featured a nine-piece Burmese band and an Albanian man who was covered in elaborate Burmese tattoos.[105] Barnum and Bailey were not alone in seeing Burmese exotica as a source of profit. A number of travelling circuses exhibited 'sacred Burmese cattle', 'of a Lilliputian size'.[106] Also, several other Burmese elephants were acquired by Western showmen, including in 1926 a genuine albino specimen named Pawah.[107] The posters advertising all these attractions usually described them as 'novelties' and claimed that viewing them had educational value, but they were essentially sold to the public as freaks.[108]

As Jonathan Saha has observed, accounts and displays of unusual people, animals and practices were 'no doubt a way of portraying Burma as a strange and backward place'.[109] It was a theme also pursued in popular literature. Before the Second World War, stories in pulp fiction magazines and 'dime novels' in places like Britain and the US promoted an unashamedly Orientalist view of Burma that emphasised its 'otherness' and encouraged highly fanciful notions about the country and its people.[110]

In 1928, for example, Samuel Hurst published a tale in *Frontier Stories* about 'the High Priest of all the wizards of Burma, the Devil of the Chin Hills'.[111] In a 1929 story titled 'Up Irrawaddy Way', Edgar Gardner described giant man-eating plants and flesh-consuming fungi.[112] In 1931, Otis Kline wrote a six-part serial for *Weird Tales* titled 'Tam, Son of the Tiger'.[113] With nods to Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* and Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* stories, it was about a boy abducted by a tiger and raised by a monk.[114] He later rescued a princess from giant, blue, dinosaur-riding creatures with four arms who lived in caves beneath Burma.[115] In 1932, a contribution to *Oriental Stories* magazine described the adventures of a 'jungle girl' in the 'devilishly dangerous' Wa country of northern Burma.[116] Burma's gemstones continued to fascinate Western audiences, as indicated by J.S. Fletcher's 1933 novelette 'The Burma Ruby'.[117] The same year, *The Literary Digest* published a story about a Burmese 'witch tiger', possessed by the soul of a sorcerer.[118] A story by Arthur Zagat published in *Dime Mystery Magazine* in 1934, titled 'Midnight Fangs', featured Burmese 'tiger-women'.[119] In 1940, Otis Kline collaborated with E. Hoffman Price to write a story for *Weird Tales* called 'Spotted Satan', about a were-leopard that preyed on Burmese teak workers.[120] In 1942, Edmond Hamilton published a story in *Fantastic Adventures* about a search for the mythical Flame of Life in Burma.[121] There were many others in the same vein.

Even the more serious illustrated magazines of the time insisted on portraying Burma as an exotic place full of rare flora and fauna, colourful 'natives' and adventurous white men. In 1909, for example, an article in the internationally-distributed *National Geographic Magazine* stated that;

> Few parts of the wide empire of Britain offer such a tempting array of features which are attractive alike to the ordinary globe-trotter, to the naturalist, the anthropologist, or the hunter of big game, as does Burma.[122]

Articles such as 'Untoured Burma' and 'Strange Tribes in the Shan States of Burma' highlighted the country's dramatic landscape, unique architecture and unusual inhabitants.[123] Emphasis was given to its 'magic and enchantment'.[124] In 1923, *Asia* magazine published an account of the 'Shy Karens of Lower Burma'.[125] In 1931, *Maclean's*, Canada's 'national magazine', published 'The Devil in the Jade', 'a strange tale of mysterious Burma', which was noteworthy for its blatant racism as much as its depiction of 'native mysticism and superstitious half-beliefs'.[126] In 1933, *Wide World* magazine printed a story by the British plant hunter Frank Kingdon Ward about 'The Unknown Triangle' of the upper Irrawaddy River. Typically, the article began: 'Irrawaddy! There is music and romance in the very name'.[127] *Life*'s contribution to public knowledge about Burma between the wars was an illustrated article about the festivities accompanying the cremation of a senior Buddhist monk.[128] It was all heady stuff for the average reader in the 'civilized' West.

From 1913, when the silent film *A Maid of Mandalay* was released in the US, these colourful images were greatly strengthened by the movies.[129] Perhaps more than any other medium of mass communication, films helped shape the public imagination of Western populations and their attitudes towards Burma and the Burmese.[130]

The early feature movies set in Burma tended to portray it as an unhealthy tropical sinkhole, populated mainly by criminals, 'fallen women' and the outcasts of empire. For example, in 1926 Lon Chaney starred in *Road to Mandalay*, described by Edith Mirante as 'a lurid silent thriller about prostitution and murder'.[131] The old royal capital featured again in *Mandalay*, which was released in 1934. This was a torrid melodrama in which a Russian refugee, abandoned by her gun-running lover, becomes the main 'hostess' in a decadent Rangoon nightclub but tries to put her past behind her on a steamer travelling up the Irrawaddy River. *The Girl from Mandalay*, released in 1936, revolved around a marriage between the jilted manager of a teak plantation and an opportunistic nightclub singer who ultimately has to prove she 'has the right stuff'.[132] So negative were the images of white people conjured up by such films that, in the minds of British officials, they risked damaging European prestige, on which the small colonial administration depended to maintain its psychological dominance, and thus political control, over the population.[133] Outside Burma, however, these plots were readily accepted as the norm and helped fix in the popular imagination a distorted picture of the country and its inhabitants, both foreign and local.

Burma's 'otherness', as depicted in these and other movies, was often highlighted by exaggerated representations of the country's sometimes gentle, sometimes harsh, but always spectacular, landscape.

3. The physical setting

> In all novels about the East the scenery is the real subject matter.
>
> George Orwell
> *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937)

Before, during and even after the colonial period, descriptions of Burma's physical geography and natural environment played a significant part in forming popular impressions of the country. In this regard, however, two contrasting images became firmly imprinted on the minds of Western audiences.

Burma is a land of tropical and temperate forests, but it has large areas of arid semi-desert. There are also high mountains, upland plateaus, major river systems, rich wetlands and wide coastal deltas. In their own ways, different aspects of the landscape appealed to the eye and imagination of foreign observers. For example, one Baptist missionary felt that Burma was 'a beautiful land', when seen on the coast, but 'still more beautiful when seen amid its mountain streams'.[134] Writing in 1897, the philanthropist Alice Hart said that 'no-one can travel by rail from Rangoon to Mandalay without being struck by the beauty of the jungle through which much of the line passes'.[135] Visitors waxed eloquent about the country's bucolic rural vistas. To Beth Ellis, for example, 'dear Burmah' was 'the Land of Pagodas and Paddy fields green'.[136] Others, like the forester C.V. Warren, were impressed by Burma's 'Eastern' sunsets, when the sky 'appeared to be on fire and the flames were the colour of saffron and of gold, of purple and of dun'.[137] In 1904, one experienced colonial officer wrote; 'Of course I know that Burma is not all beer and skittles', but he went on to lavish praise on its 'surpassing beauty'.[138] Elsewhere, he wrote that the country was 'undoubtedly one of the most beautiful in the world'.[139] Added to this, 'Burmah has almost unprecedented natural wealth'.[140]

Some sites and structures aroused feelings of awe and wonder. Ralph Fitch, for example, described the Shwedagon Pagoda (in the village that later became Rangoon) as 'the fairest place … that is in the world'.[141] An early Christian missionary viewed it as 'one of the proudest monuments of superstition in Burmah', but admitted that, seen from a distance, the 'golden monument' made 'a delightful prospect'.[142] A missionary guide book published in 1846 described the pagoda as 'grand and magnificent in the extreme'.[143] Such sentiments were echoed by other observers, including Rudyard Kipling, to whom the Shwedagon was 'a golden mystery … a beautiful winking wonder that blazed in the sun'.[144] Arriving in Rangoon by ship in 1908, and spying the pagoda on the skyline, the travel writer William Burn Murdoch could not restrain his eloquence:

> The Golden Pagoda stands up very simply and beautifully above the flat country … It seems a perfect conductor of thought from earth to sky; the gentle concave curves of its sides are more natural lines of repose than those of our challenging spires … there's a sense of happiness in the way its wide gold base amongst nestling green palms and foliage of trees contracts till the point rises quietly against the blue and fleecy clouds, where the glint of gold and flash from jewels seems to unite heaven and earth.[145]

Seeing the pagoda in 1923, the author Somerset Maugham famously wrote that it 'rose superb … glistening with its gold, like a sudden hope in the dark night of the soul'.[146] Writing in 1954, the British novelist Ethel Mannin mused 'I do not know why the Shwe Dagon is so incredibly moving. Perhaps it is because of the sheer purity of its line against the flawless sky'.[147] Other pagodas too were 'indescribably beautiful, with their huge, graceful, jewelled peaks and their lace-like, golden carvings'.[148]

Although his visit to Rangoon in 1889 was 'countable by hours', Kipling was smitten by Burma and its people, later declaring: 'Personally, I love the Burman with the blind favouritism born of first impression. When I die I will

be a Burman'.[149] After he returned to Britain he published a book about his travels, in which he described the scene below 'the old Moulmein pagoda', which he inspected after leaving the capital:

> turning me around, [I] looked upon a view of water, island, broad river, fair grazing ground, and belted wood that made me rejoice that I was alive. The hillside below me and above me was ablaze with pagodas … Far above my head there was a faint tinkle, as of golden bells, and a talking of the breezes in the tops of the toddy palms.[150]

In countless books and magazines, in prose, poetry, paintings and photographs, the Burmese countryside was portrayed along similar lines. In such scenes, replete with shapely pagodas and thatched villages, industrious 'natives' in conical sun hats ploughed their paddy fields, pursued their handicrafts and drove two-wheeled bullock carts. These humble vehicles were enthusiastically described by the London-based *Illustrated Missionary News* as 'one of the prettiest conveyances in the East'.[151]

One of the most widely read books about Burma that was published in Britain during the colonial period was *Burma Painted and Described* by the artist Robert Kelly. It was commissioned by the publisher A. & C. Black to obtain 'an accurate visible reproduction of what travellers might see when they ventured to exotic destinations such as Burma …'.[152] The book was released in 1905 with 73 coloured plates.[153] Four years later, a cheaper edition was published under the title *Burma*, reproducing 12 paintings.[154] Kelly's pictures of Burmese life were 'shaped by the desire to see it through the possibility of framed pictures'.[155] They thus reflected the tastes of his prospective clients back in Britain, and showed a country that was not only interesting and charming but also, as the current fashion demanded, 'picturesque'.[156] As Stephen Keck has written, Kelly 'offered a portrait which was appealing – and thus more marketable – than faithful visual description ever could be'.[157] Also, following in the footsteps of travel writers like Alice Hart, V. Scott O'Connor and Geraldine Mitton, Kelly described Burmese life through scenes that told a story but were devoid of any serious political content.[158] It was an idealised view that found a receptive audience not just in Britain but also in the US, where the book sold well. The 1909 edition of the book, and a reprint published in 1918, were used in school geography classes in Britain, thus influencing further generations.[159]

This idyllic picture, however, was often offset by descriptions of Burma's 'jungle', a term loosely applied to most areas outside the main population centres, and encompassing vegetation ranging from dense tropical rain forest to teak plantations and more open bushland. Few memoirs and travelogues failed to mention 'the jungle' and remark on its place in the lives of both expatriates and the local population. This gave it an international profile. Indeed, according to Raymond Bryant, 'no other country in the world has been so closely identified in the popular imagination with its forests'.[160]

The jungle was important in a number of ways. For a start, it was a key 'theatre of alterity' that attracted Orientalist interpretations and contrasts with more familiar landscapes. For example, in *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, describing his travels through Burma in 1923, Somerset Maugham wrote that the forest possessed special qualities;

> There is a moment just before sundown when the trees seem to detach themselves from the dark mass of the jungle and become individuals. Then you cannot see the wood for the trees. In the magic of the hour they seem to acquire a life of a new kind so that it is not hard to imagine that spirits inhabit them and with dusk they will have the power to change their places. You feel that at some uncertain moment some strange thing will happen to them, and they will be wondrously transfigured.[161]

Alice Hart would have agreed. To her, 'Every spot is filled with beautiful, terrible life, and it is not surprising that to the imaginative Burman the forest glades are peopled with demons and fairies'.[162] Other facets of the Burmese landscape were seen as equally mysterious and foreign. For example, a river encountered by Maugham on his journey was imbued with unique characteristics and hidden meanings:

> … you could never have mistaken it for an English river, it had none of the sunny calm of our English streams, nor their smiling nonchalance; it was dark and tragic, and its flow had the sinister intensity of the unbridled lusts of man.[163]

The river was thus vested with ominous and illicit overtones which, as Christine Doran has noted, 'were themselves closely associated in popular European thought with Asia and the Orient'.[164]

Given his popularity at the time, Maugham's travel book was influential in shaping ideas of Burma among the British reading public. George Orwell was not as well-known, and it took some years for his sales figures to equal Maugham's, but he too made a contribution to popular notions of Burma and its geography. In his novel *Burmese Days*, first published in 1934, he wrote about a 'green, unpleasant land' that was 'mostly jungle', in terms that were bound to excite wonder and dread:

> Whichever way one looked one's view was shut in by the multitudinous ranks of trees, and the tangled bushes and creepers that struggled around their bases like the sea around the piles of a pier. It was so dense, like a bramble bush extending mile after mile, that one's eyes were oppressed by it. Some of the creepers were huge, like serpents.[165]

Orwell's impressions, gained from his posting to Burma as a member of the Imperial Police from 1922 to 1927, were clearly indelible ones. Ten years after leaving the country, he wrote;

> I find that anything outrageously strange generally ends by fascinating me even when I abominate it. The landscapes of Burma, which, when I was among them, so appalled me as to assume the qualities of nightmare, afterwards stayed so hauntingly in my mind that I was obliged to write a novel about them to get rid of them.[166]

As noted above, not everyone shared Orwell's dislike of the Burmese countryside, or the mystical feelings described by Somerset Maugham, but all too often the landscape was presented to Western audiences in terms denoting alienation and fear. As Douglas Kerr has noted, 'to the European imagination, the jungle was the location and symbol of what was most foreign about the foreign parts which the European empires had penetrated'.[167]

More than any other genres, it was adventure stories and movies that made the most dramatic claims about Burma's geography, focussing as they did on the country's 'steaming' jungles, 'teeming with tropical life and potential death'.[168] For example, 'Captain' W.E. Johns, author of the popular 'Biggles' books for children, set seven of his plots in Burma.[169] In *Biggles Flies Again*, first published in 1934, he described an encounter in the 'leech-infested swamps' of the Irrawaddy delta with 'bloated foot-long centipedes', freshwater crocodiles and 'a snake of enormous dimensions'.[170] In *Biggles and the Lost Sovereigns*, Johns described the mangrove swamps found in the southern Mergui Archipelago:

> If the stench of slime and putrefying vegetable matter, with its oily scum and the bubbles of gas it discharges, is nauseating, the reptiles and insects that make it their home, preying on each other, are creatures of a nightmare.[171]

Such places were invariably accompanied by the 'noisome stench of corruption', 'an atmosphere of sinister foreboding', 'spectral wraiths of mist', and other intimations of unseen menace.[172] The tropical climate was always 'sticky' and 'oppressive' and the annual monsoon was full of 'seething fury'.[173] Purple prose was not uncommon in other books by Johns, but when he described Burma he gave his imagination free rein.[174]

A similar approach was taken by many journalists during the Second World War. Unsurprisingly, they emphasized the bitter struggle between the Allies and the Japanese under 'appalling conditions', in what Selwyn Speight of *The Sydney Morning Herald* characterized in 1943 as a 'merciless country' with 'some of the most terrible mountains in the world'.[175] In both their news dispatches and private letters, war correspondents often drew on cinematic images to describe what they saw in Burma, such as 'fantastic Hollywood-like deluges' of rain.[176] Alluding to the 1940 movie *Moon Over Burma*, for example, Speight wrote in 1944 that the jungle he encountered in Burma was:

> … real honest-to-God Dorothy Lamour stuff … tall trees shooting up into the sky and blotting out the sun; innumerable creepers hanging about like untidy cobwebs; undergrowth so thick that you have to cut your way through … The weird collection of animals that wander through Hollywood jungle movies do exist too.[177]

To Westerners new to this environment, the sights and sounds generated by the wide variety of fauna and flora were 'confusing, frightening and disorientating'.[178] There were other aspects of Burma's geography that were equally disturbing.

One was the south-west monsoon, whose high humidity, strong winds and torrential rain often attracted comment from Western residents and visitors. For example, in 1913 Joseph Dautremer, the former French Consul in Rangoon, wrote that during the wet season:

> The air is filled with electricity, lightning flashes and thunder growls almost without interruption. Pagodas, high buildings, and lofty trees are struck, and men and cattle are killed.[179]

To the civil servant Maurice Collis, posted to the Irrawaddy delta in 1920, the monsoon was 'a monstrous downpour' that meant little else could be done.[180] It was during the Second World War, however, that the problems posed by Burma's weather really struck home. During the retreat to India, for example, William Slim considered the monsoon 'the worst danger of all', given its impact on transport and communications, and the health and morale of his men.[181] When Louis Mountbatten took over as Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia in 1943, one of the most difficult problems he faced was the annual monsoon.[182] For five months, it imposed 'great hardship and strain on the fighting forces', and effectively shut down operations.[183] His solution was to continue fighting, despite the terrible conditions. However, as an Australian war correspondent wrote for *The Argus* in 1944, during the wet season Burma was 'a slimy treacherous hell'.[184] In 1945, when he was engaged in his momentous 'race for Rangoon', Slim felt that his forces faced two enemies, the retreating Japanese and the approaching monsoon.[185]

The monsoon was not the only reason that, as one colonial officer observed in 1926, 'The climate of Burma has a very bad reputation'.[186] As an official British report stated in 1944, it was also 'one of the most unhealthy in the world'.[187]

Throughout the colonial period, disease was a major problem. During the First Anglo-Burmese War, for example, about 15,000 of the 40,000 men who served in the British expeditionary forces died. Only 4% of these losses occurred in battle.[188] Malaria, cholera, smallpox, scrub typhus, dysentery, bubonic plague and venereal diseases were all serious problems for the colonial authorities.[189] Between 1905 and 1940, for example, there were 165,400 deaths from the plague reported in Burma.[190] By the time of the 'Saya San' rebellion in Lower Burma in 1930-32, valuable lessons had been learned about hygiene for troops in the field.[191] Even so, during the Second World War, disease inflicted higher casualties than enemy action. In 1944 alone, the Allies counted 250,000 reported cases of sickness, most suffering from malaria and dysentery.[192] Thanks to modern medicines, they fared better than their counterparts in the 1824-6 war but, for many in the West, Burma's reputation as a 'landscape of fear' was confirmed.[193]

At the same time as Burma was being painted in lurid colours for Western audiences, and its diverse physical challenges emphasized in prose and photographs, the obverse image of a gentler, more enticing country never entirely went away. This duality was acknowledged by the Australian war correspondent George Johnston, who wrote in his 1947 war memoir *Journey Through Tomorrow* that:

> it is a rueful thing to me, that the only memories I have of Burma are memories of war. I know nothing of the real Burma, this lovely, placid land of charming, beautiful people, the Burma that the Burmese call *Shwe Daw Pyee*, "the Golden Land".[194]

Johnston's reference to the 'real' Burma harked back to softer, more romantic notions of the country which had become fixed in the popular imagination before the Second World War. It did not matter that the picture painted was a simplistic, two-dimensional one. Indeed, that made it easier to comprehend, and remember. It was a classic case of what Edward Said referred to as 'imaginative geography', that is, the poetic endowment of a place that exceeded what was empirically known about it.[195]

4. Burmese society

> Colonial rule created much of the "Burma" seen by the outside world today.
>
> Michael Charney
> *A History of Modern Burma* (2009)

Other aspects of Burma that have tantalised and excited the Western imagination over the years include its history and society, and the ways in which the Burmese people seemed to view the world around them. Those subjects too were often represented—and misrepresented—through the vehicles of popular culture.

A key source of impressions about Burmese society, particularly during the early and mid-19th century, was books written by and about Christian missionaries, which enjoyed a wide readership in Britain and the US. As Maung Htin Aung has pointed out, however, many of these descriptions of Burma presented a 'cruel and distorted picture' of the country by apparently well-meaning but narrow-minded observers who subscribed to rigid religious and social precepts.[196] For example, an account by the pioneer American Baptist missionary Ann Judson, published in 1823, became an authoritative source for many in the West. She wrote that 'Burmans are politically and morally wretched'.[197] Moreover, she felt that she and her fellow missionaries were:

> … surrounded by despotism, avarice, and cruelty; and the darkness, the dreadful moral darkness, of heathen idolatry was evident, wherever we turned our eyes.[198]

To Judson, and many Western missionaries who followed her, the 'natives' were 'ferocious', 'barbarous' and 'depraved'. They were a 'wretched deluded people, perishing in their ignorance of the Gospel'.[199] To some Christians, 'every thought and deed' of the local children was considered 'evil'.[200] These epithets were aimed mainly at the majority Burmans, but similar descriptions were applied to members of the ethnic minorities. William Purser, for example, described the Karens as 'degraded, illiterate savages'.[201] The Kachins were accused of being 'revengeful, cruel and treacherous'.[202] Other foreigners used similar terms in their memoirs and travelogues, most of which were published in the West.[203]

Also, as one study has noted, during the 19th century characteristic Burmese behaviour was depicted in missionary writings as 'undisciplined and self-indulgent; personalities oftener than not are reported to be erratic, impetuous, and unstable'.[204] In letters and books, members of the local population were described as unpredictable and irrational, prone to sudden outbursts of violent language or behaviour. Western audiences were warned that Burmese people were subject to strong passions and sooner or later would become 'utterly unreasonable'.[205] Marilla Baker Ingalls, for example, wrote not long after arriving in Burma from the US in 1851 that it did not take much for the Burmese to become 'insolent and overbearing', and to resort to 'obscene' and 'vile' words.[206] The Burmese were characterised as offensive, vulgar and 'menacing', prone to 'almost diabolical' language and frightening, threatening gestures.[207] According to Vincent Sangermano, loud music made the Burmese dance like 'mad people', engaging in 'the most extravagant contortions'.[208] This lack of restraint, so alien and shocking to conservative and buttoned-up Western missionaries, was presented as normal behaviour, 'the accepted modes of Burmese expression'.[209]

According to Helen Trager, the 'assortment of anecdotes, normative adjectives and phrases' found in many early missionary writings, such as 'ignorance', 'arrogance', 'barbarity', 'cruelty', 'superstitious', 'bribery' and 'lazy', 'became the clichés and stereotypes used insensitively in the period and ever since'.[210] In 1883, for example, 70 years after the American Baptist Adoniram Judson led the first significant Protestant mission to Burma, an article in *The Cornhill Magazine* could still portray the population as 'uncivilized spirit worshippers, superstitious, and lazy', without exciting any adverse comment.[211]

Ann Judson and other early missionaries in Burma felt that they stood 'on the dividing line of the empires of darkness and light'.[212] Their criticisms grew increasingly bitter as it became clear that the overwhelmingly Buddhist population was impervious to their proselytising.[213] Buddhism was never going to be 'overthrown', as the missionaries and their supporters back in Britain and the US had once hoped, and sung about in their hymns.[214] Adding to their concerns, this rejection of Christianity was also seen as an implicit rejection of the West's superior culture, which was considered 'a thousand years' ahead of Burma's.[215] The prevailing belief was that the Burmese were 'a very young people – only children, big children – learning very slowly the lessons of experience and knowledge'.[216] Indeed, to many Westerners this perceived gap in social development was the ideological justification for their presence in the country and their efforts to make the locals behave more like them.[217] Resident missionaries appealed to the colonial government to ban religious and social practices that they found un-Christian, barbarous or simply wrong. After his appointment as the first Anglican bishop of Rangoon in 1877, for example, Jonathan Titcomb recommended to the authorities that they enforce Christian routines in everyday life and punish by law all those who did not comply.[218]

Gradually, however, the mood changed. Particularly after the 1879 publication of Edwin Arnold's sympathetic portrayal of Buddhism in *The Light of Asia*, there was a 'cultural attitude shift in the West concerning perceptions of the Buddha and receptivity to Buddhism'.[219] This trend was encouraged by other developments in Europe and the US, such as the publication of Charles Darwin's book *On The Origin of Species* in 1859, and the flowering of scientific enquiry, including the emergence in the 1860s of the academic discipline of comparative religion.[220] Together they challenged many of the assumptions of the established Christian Church and encouraged a more open-minded attitude. Indeed, the period in which Kipling wrote his ballad 'Mandalay' has been described by one scholar as the 'Buddhism-steeped Nineties'.[221] Increasingly, Western accounts of the Burmese portrayed them as a peaceful, spiritual people. By 1913, Burma could be described by one author as:

> The land of mysteries, the land of charm, the land of reminiscences, the land that excites the imagination and forces memory back through the ages, [it] is peopled with a delightful race, and the religious rites of these children of Buddha, their customs, their priests, and their pious nuns have a charm entirely their own.[222]

Pagodas, Buddha statues and monks in saffron robes were frequently depicted in photographs, postcards and trading cards.[223]

These changes in attitude were reflected in the literature of the period.[224] For example, in 1857, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's novel in blank verse, *Aurora Leigh*, cited 'the internal laws of the Burmese empire' as one of several obscure and, by implication, useless, subjects which respectable young ladies in Britain were obliged to study.[225] Burma and its politics were not to be taken seriously. In 1860, eight years after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, Burma was being described in novels as 'one of the most warlike of Asiatic nations'.[226] Other books and magazines contained unflattering references to dacoits.[227] However, Burma's image began to change with the publication in 1890 of Kipling's ballad 'Mandalay'. The province soon acquired a firm place in the popular imagination, mainly as the home of pagodas and pretty girls but also, by 1919, as a 'wonderful and interesting country … one of the integral parts of the world-wide British Empire'.[228] By 1924, the humourist Saki could even describe Burmese farmers as 'cultivators of rice and philosophic virtues'.[229] In 1928, when Ray Carr published his novel *Love in Burma: A Tale of the Silken East*, the country was widely accepted as 'a strange and wonderful land of pagodas and rubies'.[230] In *The Mystery of Fu Manchu* Burma was called 'the home of much that is unclean and the home of much that is inexplicable'.[231] However, *Burmese Silver*, published in 1938, described Burma as 'a most delightful and picturesque country, with delightful and … picturesque people'.[232]

One interesting source of impressions during this period was *For Love of the King: A Burmese Masque*, about the love of a Burmese king for a 'half-Italian, half-Burmese' girl 'of dazzling beauty'.[233] The play is noteworthy for two reasons. First, although it was published in 1922 as a lost work by Oscar Wilde (who died in 1900), it was written by an Irish woman named Mabel Cosgrove. Around 1894, she married a Burmese law student in Britain who claimed royal blood (becoming, so it was widely reported, the first European woman to marry a Burmese man). She called herself Mrs (or at times 'Princess') Chan Toon. Under these and other names, she

published seven novels and two collections of short stories, most set in Burma.[234] More importantly, the author lived in Burma for a period before her husband's death. She prided herself on her local knowledge and ability to interpret Burmese history and culture for Western audiences, helping to bridge the cultural divide between the two. Despite its fraudulent authorship, *For Love of the King* contained considerable factual detail, while reinforcing such tropes as palm trees, precious stones, white elephants, peacocks and 'charming Burmese girls, with huge cigars'.[235] Albeit in a highly dramatised form, the published play (it was never performed), with its detailed stage instructions, conveyed a vivid picture of Burma for the education and amusement of British and American audiences.[236]

Westerners were also receiving non-verbal messages about Burma and its people. For example, from its invention in 1839 photography quickly became a powerful medium through which the visual images provided over the years by artists and engravers could be both confirmed and corrected. To quote Paul Theroux:

> In the beginning, photography was the proof that the exotic was not the confidence trick of the traveling painters or the sketchers on board the ships of discovery.[237]

As John Falconer has pointed out, photography in Burma had a long history.[238] Both professional and amateur photographers accompanied some of the earliest diplomatic and military expeditions.[239] They were also employed by successive colonial governments to document specific developments and to record notable events, such as the visits of British dignitaries. Surveying the field in Burma, several names stand out, including Linnaeus Tripe, J. Jackson, Felice Beato, Peter Klier, Henry Watts, Frederick Skeen and D.A. Ahuja. From the late 19th century, officials, soldiers, missionaries, tourists and others too made contributions to the pictorial record.[240] As Mandy Sadan has pointed out, there were also a small number of Burmese photographers.[241] All these artists recorded sights that even by that stage were starting to pass from the local scene. Perhaps more importantly, most provided snapshots of Burma that were not only accurate in themselves, but at the same time excited wider interest in the country by exploiting its more exotic characteristics.

Postcards were another powerful vector of images and ideas. From their invention in France in 1870 they became a global phenomenon, particularly after 1894 when the British Post Office allowed the dispatch of privately printed cards through the mail. Their extraordinary popularity up to and including the First World War meant that the pictures of Burma they carried deeply penetrated Western societies.[242] One genre of postcards, known as 'native views', was especially desirable in Europe and America. They not only reinforced stereotypical views of the country but also 'relied on a pre-existing repertoire of aesthetic themes and conventions in its depiction of colonial space'.[243] Indeed, as Steven Paterson has written, they revealed 'how the British imagined and depicted the empire'.[244] He continued:

> Postcards not only linked empire and the metropole, but served to re-export imperial ideology back to Britain in condensed but effective units of information that showed "typical" scenes of the imperial encounter, which made for accelerated, if often vicarious, contact with other cultures.[245]

The widespread passion in the West for collecting postcards ensured that their images were imprinted on the minds of millions, both young and old, and helped form lasting impressions of the places depicted. This included Burma.[246] For example, when the publisher Galyons issued a series of postcards in 1905, depicting 'The King's Subjects', it included 'A Burman' in national dress standing in front of the Shwedagon Pagoda.[247]

Under both its own monarchy and the British administration, Burmese society was predominantly agricultural. Urban centres like Rangoon, Mandalay and to a lesser extent Moulmein were exceptions to the rule.[248] This encouraged portrayals of a rural landscape consisting of thousands of villages and farms basking under the benign administration of enlightened colonial officials. Contemporary illustrations invariably depicted 'contented natives' driving bullock carts and members of the country's ethnic minorities going about their (usually undefined) business.[249] As occurred when the Viceroy of India visited Rangoon in 1882, there were reports in Britain's papers of pagoda festivals and the free-wheeling displays of song and dance known as 'pooays' (*pwes*).[250] Journalists and travel writers described the 'mighty' Irrawaddy, which impressed itself on the popular imagination as 'the living soul of the land, moulded and coloured through countless ages by the influence of the majestic river'.[251] Such scenes were the subject of countless photographs, engravings and postcards. These

glimpses into 'the lotus land of Asia' were collected into albums for sale, both to tourists in Burma and others in Europe, the US and Western outposts like Canada, Australia and New Zealand.[252]

Some of the more common images, like elephants stacking teak logs, peasants ploughing paddy fields and rice boats sailing on the Irrawaddy River, were given official endorsement by being depicted on British Burma's first postage stamps, issued on 1 April 1937, when the province formally separated from India and became a crown colony in its own right.[253] For many years, few Burmese had used the colonial mail system (there was no such system before the British arrived) and postal agents fluent in Burmese and English were difficult to recruit.[254] After the fall of Mandalay in 1885, the entire country was integrated into the Burma Postal Circle of the Post Office of India and the flow of private correspondence grew rapidly (up to this point, official letters and packages were usually carried by police couriers).[255] By 1904, there were 339 post offices around the province and over 15.5 million cards and letters were being sent each year.[256] However, more than three quarters of them were written or addressed in English and in Indian scripts, indicating that the system was used mainly by non-Burmese.[257] Given this situation, it was inevitable that the postage stamps printed by the colonial government, encompassing what Keith Jeffery has called both 'iconic and symbolic elements', were encountered as much outside Burma as inside it. In this respect, they had significant representational and publicity value.[258]

One way that the British justified their rule in Burma was to point to its physical and social transformation under the colonial administration. Particularly after the fall of Mandalay in 1885, there was a flood of promotional material that trumpeted the growth of Rangoon, the province's cosmopolitan new capital.[259] Local photographers produced thousands of prints for sale and display, celebrating the construction of public buildings, offices, factories, railways and bridges.[260] Western audiences were regaled with pictures and postcards of fine buildings such as Government House, the Colonial Secretariat, the High Court, the General Post Office, the headquarters of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company and the office of Chartered Bank of India.[261] Some of the most impressive were constructed in the distinctive Indo-Saracenic style first developed in British India, while others were striking examples of the Gothic Revival, Queen Anne Renaissance and Neoclassical styles of the period.[262] Other engineering achievements were also depicted on postcards and trading cards. In 1913, for example, Lambert and Butler, a branch of Imperial Tobacco, issued a card showing a locomotive on Burma's expanding railway network.[263] Cards also celebrated major infrastructure projects like the Gokteik railway viaduct in the Shan States and the Ava Bridge across the Irrawaddy River.[264]

These feats of engineering were implicitly contrasted with the 'primitive' technology displayed by the Burmese, most of whom lived in 'frail erections of bamboo and mats, or … more substantially constructed [houses] of beams and planks' built according to their 'eccentric' taste.[265] According to one British traveller, writing in *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1888, the 'conveniences of civilised life' found no place in Burmese villages.[266]

Burma did boast some grand edifices of its own, and these too were favourite subjects for artists, for example in a series of 'Oilette' postcards produced by the British firm Raphael Tuck and Sons.[267] Also popular were hand-tinted cards printed in Germany and sold by the prolific Rangoon-based photographer D.A. Ahuja.[268] A few buildings, like the Ananda Pagoda in the ancient capital of Pagan, were credited with 'an architecture so beautiful and so singular'.[269] However, notable sites such as royal palaces, pagodas, monasteries and Buddha statues tended to be presented more as historical curiosities than as examples of technical or artistic achievement. Also, thus depicted, with little or no accompanying explanation, they could not give foreign audiences any real understanding of their political, cultural or religious significance, past or present. As Saloni Mathur has pointed out, such pictures simply catered to the curiosity and voyeurism of European spectators, and were underpinned by a range of assumptions about the inherent superiority of the British and the legitimacy of their claims to empire.[270] Broadly speaking, these images were held up to underline the achievements of the colonial administration in 'taming' Burma and turning it into a peaceful and productive outpost of the British crown.

Photos and postcards were not the only mass-produced media products able to spread images and information during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In different ways, magic lantern slides and stereo viewing cards also brought visual information about Burmese society directly to Western audiences.

Magic lantern slides were mounted glass plates that carried either a hand-painted scene, or a positive photographic print. They were typically about 3.25 inches (8.2 cm) square, so that they could be placed one at a time in front of a light source for projection via one or more lenses onto a wall or screen. The original projectors were large and unwieldy, but in 1821 a lightweight, transportable model was developed. From then until the mid-20th century magic lantern shows were widely used for public lectures and other educational purposes. They were an effective way of sharing images and information with large audiences, for example in town halls and at village fairs. When Burma was the subject, they tended to reinforce the usual stereotypical impressions. For example, one slide, dated 1890, showed a traditional Burmese racing boat.[271] Another, dated around 1900, was of a bullock cart. One produced in 1920 was of a group of Buddhist monks.[272] The Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC has a collection of hand-tinted magic lantern slides that once belonged to the American missionary Willard Graves, who was the Principal of the Methodist Episcopal School for boys in Rangoon from 1908 to 1913. The 67 slides in the collection appear to have been prepared for public presentation in the US and show familiar views of Burma and Burmese life.[273]

Insights into the nature of Burmese society were also promised by stereo viewing cards, which were very popular around the same time. After the invention of the Holmes stereoscope in 1861, viewers were simple hand-held devices consisting of two prismatic lenses, a wooden stand to hold the card (or cards) being viewed, and a handle. They permitted a person to look at two almost identical photographs simultaneously, thus achieving a three-dimensional effect. There were two basic systems. In the first, pairs of small cards had to be mounted separately on the viewing frame. In 1928, for example, Cavanders Limited issued a series of cards labelled 'Peeps Into Many Lands' (one of which was Burma) with its Army Club cigarettes. They could be viewed through a 'Camerascope', also available from Cavanders.[274] The other method used cards that tended to be a little larger and stiffer, and had two sepia or black and white photographs already fixed, ready for viewing. Burmese scenes were reproduced on such cards and sold to the public, mainly in the US but also in Britain and further afield.[275] Some firms, like the Stereo Travel Company of New York in 1908, sold views of Burma in specially marked boxes of 100 cards.

Other firms sold cards in smaller lots, or individually. For example, in 1906 and 1907 the US firm of Underwood and Underwood issued a series of 36 views of Burma.[276] It covered all the usual subjects, including Buddha statues, pagodas and teak rafts on the Irrawaddy.[277] After it acquired most of Underwood's inventory in 1920, the Keystone View Company continued to produce stereo cards about Burma. They included 'Splendid Honours to Dead Buddhist' (showing the funeral of a senior monk) and 'Queer boats used at Rangoon, Burma' (about the small flat-bottomed rowing vessels called *thampan*, used to ferry people across the Rangoon river).[278] The American firm H.C. White also produced a range of stereo cards with scenes like 'The Queen's Golden Monastery, a gem of oriental architecture' and 'An elephant putting a huge log of teakwood into place, lumber yard, Rangoon, Burma'.[279] Some cards had printed texts on the reverse side, giving a brief outline of Burma, its location and details of the scene being viewed. These descriptions often confirmed popular prejudices. For example, one Keystone card stated that Mandalay, 'built in 1856-57, came under British rule in 1886, much to its benefit, for the cruelty of the rule of King Theebaw was beyond belief'.[280]

Particularly between 1895 and 1918, a period described by one scholar as the 'apogee of British governance' in Burma, these packaged and cleverly marketed images were readily accepted by Western populations that were being presented with a brighter and more optimistic picture than those provided by many earlier observers.[281] By then, Burma had effectively been 'pacified' and its economy was growing rapidly. British rule was deemed to have been a success, and accepted gratefully by the local population. The Burmese were now seen as 'adaptable and easily civilised'.[282] Public representations of the colony emphasised its stability, harmony and geniality. In an 1897 issue of the American literary journal *The Dial*, for example, Hiram Stanley commented:

> In the Middle Orient lies idyllic and picturesque Burma, a paradisiac land where winter and want never invade.[283]

When the Prince of Wales (later King George V) toured Burma in 1906, the 'real Burmese' were described by a Calcutta-based journalist in his party as:

> The clean, happy-go-lucky aristocratic children of the land, content to leave the sordid pursuit of lucre to their more astute and prosaic competitors from East and West … It is an idyllic people, almost unreal in its delicate quaintness'.[284]

By 1916, the Burmese were being described in books as 'the happiest people on earth'.[285] In 1921, J.G. Scott wrote that 'the Burmese are probably the most engaging race in the East'.[286] Herbert Hoover, who worked in Burma as a mining engineer before becoming president of the US in 1929, considered the Burmese 'the only truly happy and cheerful race in all Asia'.[287]

So 'light-hearted and pleasant' were the Burmese considered to be that, from an early date, the British dubbed them 'the Irish of the East'.[288] This was mainly on the grounds that the Irish too were cheerful and easy-going. There were, however, other reasons offered for this stereotypical and, by current standards, rather racist label. The historian D.G.E. Hall, for example, suggested that the Burmese were often called 'the Irish of the East' because 'sentiment weighs far more with them than reason'.[289] This was perhaps a polite way of saying that, to the British, both populations could be feisty and contradictory, even combative. Some other observers felt that the label was applicable because both Burma and Ireland were largely rural societies, dominated by small land holdings. In 1886, both of these explanations were in J.G. Scott's mind when he compared the Burmese with the Irish:

> In their love of fun and rollicking they certainly resemble "the finest peasantry in the world" and they are quite as ready to break one another's heads for the mere joke of the thing.[290]

The label was even discussed in Burma's 1901 census report.[291] After considering the bizarre theory that the Irish were descended from Burmese bronze workers, who had reached Ireland in prehistoric times, the colonial authorities concluded that any affinity in the character of the two races was 'the purest chance'.[292] Burmese opposition leader (and now State Counsellor) Aung San Suu Kyi once remarked that the label 'the Irish of the East' was not meant as a compliment but, ironically, her father and the nationalist movement he led in the 1930s willingly embraced it.[293] They looked to Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army as models of anti-British protest which they could follow.[294]

At least until the 1930s, when a variety of political, economic and social tensions boiled over, there was rarely any mention of racial and religious conflicts, economic and agrarian unrest or the rise of a nationalist movement that was dedicated to the removal of the occupying British regime.[295]

The apparent success of colonial rule in Burma was a source of great satisfaction in the West. Inspired by notions of social Darwinism, and encouraged by militant Christians, many felt that Britain (and, through its Baptist missionaries, the US) were on a civilising mission in Burma. As Kipling later wrote to his American readers, it was 'the white man's burden' to 'send forth the best ye breed … to serve your captives' need'.[296] To those holding this view, the benefits to 'primitive', 'barbaric' Burma were obvious. According to one commentator, writing a few years after the fall of Mandalay in 1885:

> If riches and personal comfort, protection of property, just laws, incorruptible judges and rulers, are blessings as a set-off against Utopian dreams of freedom, then Jack Burman has a happy future.[297]

Britain's dominance was made possible in large part by its military and economic power, and its advanced technology. However, as one of Orwell's fictional characters claimed, the British saw themselves as 'torchbearers on the path of progress'.[298] This attitude was reflected in official and private activities, and commercial ventures, in the metropole.

It has been claimed that, by the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, the portrayal of the empire in such positive terms was a 'gigantic confidence trick' to distract people from Britain's faltering great power status.[299] If this was indeed so, it was made easier in Burma's case by the ignorance of the population, both in Britain and the West more generally.

J.G. Scott once remarked that Burma was 'a sort of recess, a blind alley, a back reach'.[300] Not only was it hard to get to, but it always seemed to be hidden behind a veil of myths, mysteries and misconceptions. As early as 1795, Michael Symes, the British ambassador sent to the court of King Bodawpaya, observed:

> Of the kingdom of Ava, or the Birman Empire, so little is known to the European world that many persons of liberal education, when the name of the country has been mentioned, were at a loss on what part of the globe to seek for its position; and some were even unacquainted with the existence of such a nation.[301]

This remained the case for centuries. As *The Sydney Morning Herald* observed in 1925, Burma was 'a little known place, as far as the outside world was concerned, and in England was often confused with Bermuda'.[302] Only a small number of Westerners had first-hand experience of the place. The colonial government was not large, and the military units posted there rarely stayed for more than a year or two. Most businesses were run by a relative handful of foreigners supported by local staffs, and only the largest firms, like Burmah Oil, the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation and the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, were well known outside the country.[303] Tourism was never a major factor. Literary travellers like Somerset Maugham (in 1923), Aldous Huxley (in 1926) and H.G. Wells (in 1939) wrote about Burma but none spent very long there and, possibly apart from Maugham, their writings did not arouse significant interest in the country.[304] Indeed, in some ways, their brief thumbnail sketches of the local population simply confirmed old stereotypes. To Huxley, for example, the Burmese were 'a spirited race … a little too highly so, perhaps'.[305] H.G. Wells thought 'the Burman' 'a smiling, obdurate humourist who shines in opposition'.[306]

A few artists helped implant vivid visual images of Burma but, as one colonial official told a London audience in 1913, the country was usually associated in the public mind with 'rice, teak, rubies – dacoits and malaria perhaps'.[307] Similar sentiments were expressed by another Old Burma Hand in the 1930s. In his memoirs, he wrote:

> Up to the [second world] war, Burma was an almost unknown area on the map of the Empire. Just part of India.[308]

Even after the Japanese surrender in 1945, there was no appreciable Burma lobby in the West to publicise the colony, or promote its interests. In a 1952 book, the well-educated and well-travelled writer Norman Lewis had to confess to his 'extraordinary ignorance' of Burma.[309] He was not alone. In 1957, the historian Hugh Tinker summed up the situation as follows:

> The British community in Burma was so small, and the period of British rule so brief that no comparable [to India] connection ever developed. To the average Englishman Burma conjured up one poem and perhaps a short story by Kipling — Kipling, who spent three days in Burma.[310]

As a result, the wider public in Britain, and elsewhere in the West, were largely dependent on the selective, sometimes distorted and often misleading representations of Burma and the Burmese that could be derived from war stories, mass communications and the vehicles of popular culture.

5. The role of women

> Is it a sin to say that I like the Burmese maiden?
>
> John Foster Fraser
> 'The Burmese Girl'
> *Lady's Realm* (1898)

Perhaps nothing epitomized the mixed Western attitudes towards Burma during the colonial period more than the way in which the country's women were portrayed, based on both direct experience and hearsay. For, as noted above, from the earliest times Burmese women made a strong impression on foreign observers. Even after acknowledging the fascination that Western men always seemed to have had with Asian women, the quintessential 'Burma girl' cast a special kind of spell.[311] This helped to ensure that she featured prominently not only in Western literature and high art, but also in the many vehicles of popular culture.

When Kipling briefly passed through Burma in 1889, he was struck by the beauty and grace of the local women, particularly one girl he saw sitting on the steps of a pagoda at Moulmein. She inspired his poem 'Mandalay'.[312] It first appeared in the literary weekly *The Scots Observer* on 21 June 1890.[313] It was later included in the collection *Barrack Room Ballads and Other Verses*, published in London in 1892. Its opening lines resonated deeply within the Western psyche:

> By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' eastward to the sea,
> There's a Burma girl a-settin', and I know she thinks o' me;
> For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the temple-bells they say:
> 'Come you back, you British soldier; come you back to Mandalay!' [314]

It is difficult to overestimate the impact this work had on popular perceptions of Burma and its women. The poem became immensely popular in Britain and the US, and was familiar to many further afield, particularly in the English-speaking dominions. In the half century that followed its first appearance, it not only inspired more than 180 adaptions and imitations, both in verse and music, but it also helped shape Western images of Burma and Burmese society in ways that still resonate today.[315]

The popularity of these entertainments in the West, however, and their impact on the public imagination, was a mixed blessing.

For example, the pictorial covers of the sheet music that carried Burma-related tunes often featured young women. Some were Europeans, in European clothes, but most were clearly meant to be Burmese. A few were in broadly authentic Burmese dress, such as the girl on the cover of Bewicke Beverley's 1893 'Mandalay Waltz'.[316] A song called 'Zenobie', released in 1904, was subtitled 'A Hindoo Love Song', but the girl depicted on the cover wore recognisably Burmese clothes.[317] Others, however, were dressed in costumes reminiscent of conservative Middle Eastern, Indian or Japanese cultures.[318] Some pictures were pure fantasy. For example, the young girl depicted on the cover of Oley Speaks' adaption of 'The Road to Mandalay', published to great acclaim in the US in 1907, seems to be the result of a Western artist's dreams of *harem* girls in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, complete with diaphanous clothes and curly-toed slippers.[319] The cover of the sheet music for *Danse Birmane*, by the French composer Maurice Yvain, depicted a half-naked dancing girl wearing a multi-tiered *magaik* crown.[320] A topless Burmese girl also featured on the cover of the sheet music for the 1942 American song 'From Tokio to Mandalay'.[321]

While there were exceptions, few of the musical reviews of the period showed any real knowledge, let alone understanding, of Burma's traditional society or culture. In 1905, for example, *The Blue Moon* purported to depict scenes in Burma but any Burmese man or woman in the audience could be forgiven for thinking that the action was taking place in another country. The music itself was not in any way distinctive.[322] As the British musicologist Jack Westrup once said of Henry Purcell's 1695 opera *The Indian Queen*, 'For all the music tells us, the action might be taking place in St. James's Park', in London. [323] Nor was any serious attempt made to provide genuine local colour. The 'Burmese' characters had vaguely Indian-sounding names like 'Chandra Nil' and 'Moolraj'. It was left to the scene painter and costume designer to provide the appropriate atmosphere, yet the clothes worn on stage represented a curious mixture of Chinese, Japanese and Indian dress codes.[324] The elaborate headdresses worn by both male and female actors would not have appeared out of place in a traditional Chinese opera.

There were a few ways, however, in which Western audiences could gain an appreciation of the national dress and traditional hairstyles of Burmese women. For example, Frederick Goodall's 1899 oil painting 'On the Road to Mandalay' accurately depicted a Burmese girl sitting by a pagoda with a British soldier.[325] After a visit to Burma in 1908-9, Gerald Festus Kelly consolidated the romantic image of the country with his gentle landscapes and pictures of young Burmese dancers in colourful costumes.[326] He was further inspired by a beautiful Shan 'princess' he met in London in 1931. Over the next 30 years, he painted more than 20 portraits of this young woman in national dress, under such titles as 'Sao Ohn Nyunt', 'Burmese Princess', 'Burmese Silk', 'Burmese Pearl' and 'The Yellow Tamein'.[327] In all of these paintings, the subject's hair was swept up in the 'neat, high chignon of the times', with a flower (or flowers) tucked into its base.[328] Both the original paintings and later printed copies were very accomplished and, as highly romanticised and accessible representations of the exotic East, were very popular in the West. Indeed, since the 1930s, over 50,000 prints have been sold of just three portraits in this series.[329] Revealingly, the writer Somerset Maugham said of Kelly's Burma paintings that he had 'given us the character of the East as we of our generation see it'.[330]

Burmese women were described by many foreign observers as 'on the whole, remarkably good-looking', with 'faultless figures'.[331] Kipling thought that they were 'very pretty'.[332] Another British visitor wrote that 'I have never in my life seen more perfect figures than those possessed by the young girls'.[333] According to one local scholar, 'Even that proud conqueror of Ava, Lord Dufferin, although he was received with dark looks by the Burmese during his state visit to Mandalay early in 1886, wrote back to a friend in England, extolling the grace, charm and freedom of Burmese women'.[334] Kipling tapped into this feeling when he wrote:

> Tho' I walks with fifty 'ousemaids outer Chelsea to the Strand,
> An' they talks a lot o' lovin', but wot do they understand?
> Beefy face an' grubby 'and –
> Law! Wot do they understand?
> I've a neater, sweeter maiden in a cleaner, greener land!
> On the road to Mandalay ...[335]

In other ways too, European women suffered from comparisons with their Burmese counterparts. While the latter were often presented in a romantic, idealized setting, they were also seen as practical and hard-working. To some colonialists, and chauvinists back in Britain, this was in stark contrast to 'ornamental' European women, who some men familiar with Asia considered 'a useless, expensive misery'.[336]

Even to those not disposed to share such views, Burmese women were seen as remarkably independent. In contemporary Western writings, there were frequent comparisons with less tolerant cultures and approving references to the fact that in Buddhist Burma women did not have to submit to practices such as *sati* or *purdah*.[337] For example, in 1823 Ann Judson wrote that in Burma 'the sexes have equally free intercourse as in Europe'.[338] In 1878, Charles Forbes wrote that:

> Though the inferiority of the softer sex is a point that has never been disputed, in Burma women enjoy a much freer and higher position than elsewhere in the East; indeed, in some matters they have attained rights that their sisters in England are still seeking to obtain, or have only lately gained.[339]

J.G. Scott felt that 'Burmese maidens … enjoy a freer and happier position than in any other Eastern country, and in some respects are better off even than women in England'.[340] Alice Hart opined that women in Burma were 'probably freer and happier than they are anywhere else in the world'.[341] Alluding to the large number of Buddhist monks in the country, and the role of women in its civil society, she added that 'Things are strangely reversed in Burma, for here we see man as the religious soul of the nation and woman as the brain'.[342]

As Chie Ikeya and a number of other modern scholars have pointed out, the situation was much more complicated than often portrayed, but most observers agreed that in a number of important ways Burmese women enjoyed a social standing that was not shared by others elsewhere in Asia.[343]

They were also considered to be excellent business and household managers. Writing about 'the Burmese wife', for example, J.G. Scott stated that 'she keeps the shop that is to be found in almost every house in the country towns, and usually makes far more money than the goodman himself'.[344] In Burma, wrote another British observer, 'few husbands would dare to enter into any mercantile arrangements without the aid or advice of their wives'.[345] Other foreign visitors commented on the dominant role that Burmese women played in the local markets and bazaars. In his 1888 short story 'Georgie Porgie', for example, Kipling noted that:

> No race, men say who know, produces such good wives and heads of households as the Burmese.[346]

In a report to the University of Chicago in 1907, Alleyne Ireland put it a little differently when he wrote of the Burmese:

> Great dabblers in small mercantile ventures, they may be called (the women especially) a race of hucksters.[347]

Soon after the Second World War, the Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett was reflecting a widespread view of Burmese women when he wrote that 'Throughout the East they are known for their shrewdness in business dealings, their independence, and the fact of their higher social status than any of their sisters in Asia'.[348]

To many Westerners, the strong position of women in Burmese society was seen as unnatural, even threatening. In *The Lacquer Lady*, for example, the novelist F. Tennyson Jesse has a male missionary character express concern that 'the whole country is in the hands of women'. He felt 'the whole nation had the danger of the female in its essence'.[349] The high status of women inevitably had implications for Burmese men, who were often characterized as lazy, weak and effeminate. As explained by Lucy Delap, 'the mentality and dress of Burmese men were perceived as feminine, and Burma was seen as a place of gender equity because the sexes could not easily be distinguished'.[350] She continued:

> The narrative of Burmese gender equality was an ambivalent one, with concerns about the deficiencies of Burmese men, and sexuality more generally, running alongside celebrations of the freedoms of Burmese women.[351]

Fielding Hall denied that the local men were effeminate but admitted that 'they were under woman's governance'.[352] Various reasons were put forward to account for Burma's supposed 'topsy-turvy gender relations' but in practical terms such perceptions raised a number of problems.[353] One was that ethnic Burman men were not considered suitable to serve in key instruments of state power and authority, such as the army and police force, a view which would have serious consequences for the colony's political development.[354]

At the same time as they were being described as strong and independent, Burmese women were constantly being patronised and infantilised, treated as though they (and the Burmese people more generally) were 'immature and incomplete, and therefore in need of protection and control by a more historically adult people, which is how the British thought of and represented themselves'.[355] This attitude was exemplified by H. Fielding Hall who, despite wide experience in Burma, could still write a book titled *A People at School*.[356] While at one level their independence and business acumen were acknowledged, Burmese women were repeatedly dismissed by officials, tourists and others as 'happy, smiling, care-free little women' and 'grinning, good-humoured little maidens'.[357] One observer felt that 'a more cheery little body is not to be met with on earth'.[358]

Burmese girls were also praised for their delicate charm and 'winsome womanhood'.[359] In 1894, an American tourist wrote that they were 'sweetly pretty'.[360] A popular 1905 postcard informed Westerners that 'Life to them must seem a great joke, as they are always laughing'.[361] In 1907, a visitor to Burma described them as 'dear coquettish little things'.[362] Six years later, a study of Asian women and their interactions with Western men argued that, in rural Burma, 'the maidens are as simple and sweet as wild flowers'.[363]

These remarks were usually meant as compliments. To both men and women in Western countries, the supposedly childlike qualities of Burmese women added to their charm. It also helped to justify Britain's paternalistic imperial rule.

Whatever their private opinions, these feelings were shrewdly exploited by local entrepreneurs. From the 1870s onwards, as Burma opened up to trade and tourism, photographers like Felice Beato, Philip van Klier, and Watts and Skeen turned out thousands of prints of Burmese women for public sale.[364] As John Falconer has written, the ubiquity of such pictures reflected 'the demands of the European market with a vision of Burma as picturesque and exotic'. They also evoked notions of 'a romantic and languorous orient'.[365] These photographs were also used to produce postcards, notably by D.A. Ahuja. In them, girls were shown in staged poses standing or seated in front of studio backdrops. They wore traditional clothes, including rich costumes usually reserved for royalty or the stage.[366] Many were depicted holding a fan or an umbrella, or smoking a cheroot, seen in the West as a sign of a woman's liberation, or perhaps decadence.[367] Sometimes, the props were taken completely out of context. For example, in one photograph a young girl in court dress was shown sitting on a bicycle.[368] Other pictures were of women from Burma's ethnic minorities, wearing national dress and displaying distinctive features, like elaborate headgear, large ear-rings, brass neck rings or facial tattoos. Despite such trappings, however, all these subjects looked demure.[369]

The modesty typically shown by Burmese girls was in contrast to the apparent willingness of women from North Africa and elsewhere (including parts of Asia) to be photographed naked or semi-naked for French postcards.[370] For example, the 'fine weather tourist' Paul Edmonds noted in his 1924 book *Peacocks and Pagodas*, presumably after enquiries, that it was difficult to persuade Burmese girls to pose for artists in the nude, or even topless.[371] Buddhist conservatism and a strong personal sense of *ah-shet* (shame, or shyness) made that impossible. The most risqué postcard on sale during the colonial period was of 'S.W. Monsoon Gale', in which a young Burmese girl was depicted with her *htamein* open to reveal her leg above the knee.[372] This was once a common sight, Alexander Hamilton for example referring to the routine exposure of a 'pretty leg and a plump thigh'.[373] In 1860, W.H. Marshall wrote that the dress of Burmese women was 'unbecoming and indecent', as 'nearly the whole of the right leg and thigh is exposed when walking'.[374] According to J.G. Scott, such revealing garments disappeared due to lecherous foreign men and moralistic missionaries, although there were practical, economic and social reasons as well.[375] Except for ceremonial occasions, the *htamein* was replaced by closed (sewn) *longyis* for women, a fashion that soon became equated with traditional cultural norms, to be preferred over any decadent Western styles.[376] Simple, tubular cotton *longyis* had long been the norm among poorer and rural Burmese.[377]

There is another Ahuja postcard titled 'Self-admiration', in which a girl is seen standing in front of a mirror with one breast exposed.[378] The *sari* and anklet she is wearing, however, suggests that she is Indian, not Burmese. One early British resident of Burma commented that 'the women of the lower class are usually naked from the waist upwards', but this does not appear to have been a widespread practice, at least among ethnic Burman women, and certainly not in the population centres.[379] A few other postcards of the time showed bare-breasted women, but they were always from smaller ethnic minorities such as the Wa, Nung, Mru, Kami, Naga and Andamanese.[380] As J.G. Scott famously remarked of the Wa, in the hot weather and in the villages the women went around 'all unabashed, unhaberdashed, unheeding'.[381] These cards seem to have been justified by what was later dubbed the 'ethnographic alibi', the study of so-called 'primitive' peoples on Burma's periphery permitting a degree of artistic licence normally forbidden by strict censorship laws in the West. Such pictures doubtless also sought to 'build on a lively photographic tradition which seeks to represent [naked 'natives'] as the epitome of the exotic'.[382] It is still possible to purchase coffee table books depicting semi-naked women from at least one of Burma's ethnic minorities.[383]

Despite their characterization as 'dainty damsels' and 'little silken ladies', however, and the absence of risqué postcards, Burmese women retained their reputation for sexual availability.[384] For example, one British visitor, writing in 1879, observed that 'judging the Burmese by our own standard of morality, theirs is certainly a loose one'.[385] He continued;

> It was a common custom for our European bachelor, on first arrival in the country, to take himself a Burmese girl to live with him, and as long as he remained in the country she was to all intents and purposes his wife.[386]

George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India from 1895-1903, was reported to have said that Burmese girls were 'busy engaging females, with a natural aptitude for the society of men'.[387] This observation seems to have been based on the fact that, in 1898, it was estimated that about 90% of British officials in Burma had local mistresses or 'temporary wives'.[388] This was in contrast to India and Ceylon where, by the 1860s, such arrangements were no longer as common, or as socially acceptable.[389] George Orwell claimed that 'social relations' were always friendlier in Burma than in India, due to the 'native geniality' of the Burmese and to the 'fewness' of European women.[390] It was with such practices in mind that one Western observer of the Asian scene could note that: 'The country and the people make a special appeal to the white resident'.[391]

Inevitably, the ubiquity of 'concubines' in Burma aroused the ire of moral campaigners in Britain. The ensuing debate pitted missionaries and others against colonial officials, who recognised the difficulty of preventing men in Burma, particularly those posted to remote districts, from taking local partners. The authorities were concerned, however, about the undue influence that Burmese mistresses might have on official business. In 1867, for example, the Chief Commissioner of Burma claimed that;

> With a race like the Burmese, accustomed under their former Native Government to bribery and chicane, it is probable that in no case is a Burmese mistress altogether free from evil influences'.[392]

In official correspondence, Burmese women were often cast as a dangerous distraction, able to manipulate gullible men into making decisions favouring them and their private petitioners. A number of edicts were issued, warning against the risks posed by these personal relationships.[393] However, even when offending officers faced adverse consequences for their careers, such as a delayed promotion or even a transfer to India, there was never any real expectation that such orders would be observed, or enforced by the colonial authorities.[394] In 1916, the London-based Association for Social and Moral Hygiene reported that 'The general attitude of the Local [colonial] Government towards the concubinage of Europeans and Burmese women and girls has been one not only of leniency and condonation, but of positive friendliness'.[395] To religious conservatives, Burma was considered 'one of the most immoral [countries] in the world'.[396]

In these circumstances, it is little wonder that Western audiences were regaled with tales about Burmese mistresses. In Kipling's story 'Georgie Porgie', for example, a British colonial officer purchased a Burmese 'wife' but later returned home to marry an English girl.[397] Somerset Maugham told a similar tale in 'Masterson', a short story published in 1929 and later included in his travelogue *A Gentleman in the Parlour*.[398] The naturalised American writer Frank Harris included a reference to Burmese girls in his tell-all autobiography, *My Life and Loves*, which appeared between 1922 and 1927:

> There in Rangoon began for me a new series of experiences which forced me to the conclusion that the Burmese half-caste girl is one of the most fascinating in God's world, as she is one of the prettiest and best-formed; she is cheap, too.[399]

F. Tennyson Jesse who, according to one scholar wrote 'the best of Anglo-Indian historical novels' in 1929, also touched on the 'shockingly immoral' practice of young Englishmen taking Burmese wives.[400] Mistresses were the subject of several other literary works, some loosely based on personal experiences. One was Pablo Neruda's 'Widower's Tango', written after the Chilean poet's diplomatic posting to Rangoon from 1927 to 1928.[401] Another was Orwell's novel *Burmese Days*. H.E. Bates' post-war novel *The Jacaranda Tree* featured a Westerner with a Burmese mistress, as did Ethel Mannin's story *The Living Lotus*, published in 1956.[402] It was an accepted part of colonial life in Burma that was repeatedly reflected in popular Western literature.

6. Economies and cultures

> British rule was welcome in liberating them from the various restrictions and abuses of Burmese rule and custom. It brought new freedom and new opportunities to gratify new wants, and in all such material aspects of life it promoted a higher standard of living.
>
> J.S. Furnivall
> 'Foreword'
> J.R. Andrus, *Burmese Economic Life* (1948)

At the same time as conservative, patriarchal societies in the West were being shocked or titillated by such stories, they were subject to wide-ranging and multi-layered campaigns by business houses and other commercial enterprises, which reinforced tailored and homogenised views of Burma through trade cards, picture postcards, wall posters and other forms of advertising.

Notwithstanding the appearance, in the 19th century, of newspapers and national magazines designed for mass circulation, trade cards were a common way of promoting commercial products. They came into their own in the mid-1800s, when the development of lithographic printing techniques made it possible to produce cards in large numbers, and in colour. They typically had an illustration on one side and a short printed text on the other, and were included in containers of produce. As the new century approached, many businesses began to issue series of numbered cards with specific themes. This was essentially a marketing device intended to promote sales by encouraging people to acquire complete sets, if necessary by swapping duplicates with other collectors. They came in many forms, but of particular note were the small cards used after 1875 to stiffen soft packets of cigarettes. These quickly became known as 'cigarette cards'. By the 1920s, card collecting and trading was an international phenomenon, with millions of cards being produced annually, in many countries.[403] Not all were in the West.[404] Some companies also produced special albums in which collectors could keep their cards.

As already noted, some of these cards made reference to Burma, either as part of a discrete series, or as a subject in its own right.[405] For example, one postcard-sized trade card produced by the Singer Manufacturing Company in 1892 depicted three Burmese women sitting around a treadle sewing machine, an appliance that was introduced to Burma in 1874. An even larger trade card, issued around the same time by the Chicago coffee company W.F. McLaughlin, showed a Burmese girl in formal court dress. McLaughlin's also issued a card showing 'devotees' throwing themselves under the feet of a sacred white elephant, in what was probably intended to be Burma.[406] One series produced by Britain's Liebig Company in several European languages showed six scenes taken from Burmese history.[407] Series of cigarette cards included illustrations of Burma's colonial crest and the flags flown before and after its annexation by Britain. Others showed medals issued to British and Indian servicemen who had fought in Burma.[408] A series on colonial regiments depicted a member of the Burma Rifles while another, about colonial police forces, showed a Burmese policeman in his distinctive uniform.[409] One series of 25 cards issued by the British tobacco firm Ogden's around 1919 was devoted entirely to pictures of Burmese women in national dress, probably for distribution with packets of 'Polo' cigarettes in Burma itself.

Such cards added to Burma's allure, but the most powerful impressions were created by those purporting to show 'typical' Burmese scenes and people. These usually included views of pagodas, 'native' villages and bullock carts. Portraits of Burmese girls in traditional dress were also common, as were pictures of the country's many ethnic minorities, in their colourful national costumes.[410] Several firms, like the US's New England Confectionary Company in 1930, and Germany's Salem-Bilder cigarette company in 1932, issued cards portraying 'giraffe-neck' Padaung women.[411] Another popular subject was Burma's capital Rangoon and the iconic Shwedagon

Pagoda at its heart.[412] Several cards depicted Kyaiktiyo Pagoda, precariously balanced on a giant boulder in the north of Mon State.[413] While most cards had simple labels, some tried to educate collectors and carried descriptions of Burma, or commented on the specific aspects of Burmese life they depicted. In most cases, the texts were short and to the point, but some were quite lengthy, such as those printed on the back of six cards issued in 1910 by the German shoe polish manufacturer Diamantine, and the set issued in 1914 by the chocolate maker Gartmann.[414]

Many of the images and explanatory texts on these cards were, as far as they went, accurate and informative. Typical was one cigarette card issued in 1908 by the British tobacco manufacturer W.D. and H.O. Wills, which informed collectors that 'Burma is the largest province of the Indian empire, having a total of 236,733 square miles and a population of 10½ million'.[415] Another cigarette card, produced by Hignett Brothers and Company in 1905, and showing the original Rangoon General Post Office, was surprisingly self-aware, given the times. The text on the back of the card read:

> This is a typically English building in its style of architecture and construction, and contrasts strongly with the native structures, which are all lightness and grace. It is, however, well adapted for the purposes it is intended to serve, and creates – perhaps unintentionally – a good impression of the solidity and might of British Empire building.[416]

To take another example, the cigarette cards that depicted the medals awarded to servicemen and policemen who fought in various conflicts in Burma were usually accompanied by helpful factual texts.[417] Such cards, however, tended to be the exception to the rule. Others were not as accurate or balanced.

The texts and images on some cards were misleading or simply inaccurate. One card produced in 1910 by Recruit Little Cigars, for example, was labelled 'Burmah', but depicted a Sikh in a turban.[418] Burmese women were sometimes shown in Indian dress or, as already noted, clothes that stemmed largely from the imaginations of Western illustrators.[419] Other cards were patronising, if not actually racist. For example, one repeated the frequent claim that the Burmese were 'the Irish of the East', as they were 'good-natured and easy-going, gay and lively'.[420] A cigarette card released by Ogden's depicting a bullock cart stated on its reverse that 'Unlike some other Oriental races, the Burmese are kind to their animals'.[421] A card issued by Smith's Oriental Cigarettes in 1900, simply labelled 'Burma', proclaimed;

> The women make good wives and have a keen insight for business … They have a curious custom of inserting small scraps of metal, &c., under the skin as charms, which look like unsightly warts on the chest and arms.[422]

In 1927, W.D. and H.O. Wills produced a card labelled 'Burmese' as part of its 'Picturesque People of the Empire' series. The image of a man in traditional clothes on the obverse side was accurate enough, but the text on the reverse side described the Burmese people as 'rather inclined to indolence'. It continued: 'Burmese men are unable to compete with the Chinese, Japanese and Hindus who settle in their country'.[423] A card showing a Burmese policeman stated that the unusually high crime rate in Burma was due to the tropical climate and the locals' 'ungovernable temper'. It said: 'Life is taken by stabbing on the flimsiest provocation'.[424] On another card, it was stated that a Kachin 'chief' was content 'as long as he has a well-thatched roof' on his 'very poor sort of dwelling'.[425]

Burma was primarily a land of small farms and cottage industries, but after the annexation of Lower Burma in 1852 the economic life of the country began to be dominated by large British conglomerates, which exploited the country's agricultural bounty and rich natural resources, notably rice, timber, oil and precious stones.[426] By 1931, for example, Burma was the largest rice producing country in the world.[427] Its teak forests were world famous. British Burma was one of the world's first oil producers, exporting its first barrel of crude in 1853.[428] All these industries were celebrated in a range of promotional materials, including trade cards and cigarette cards. For example, in 1916 Will's Cigarettes produced a series of cards on mining that included two about Burmese rubies.[429] In 1927, the British tobacco manufacturer Godfrey Philips issued two cards in its 'Empire Industries' series that showed rice growing and teak tree felling in Burma.[430] In 1938, the Typhoo Company included a card about Burma's teak forests in its packets of tea. It showed elephants hauling logs and included

a brief description of the Burmese timber industry.[431] The depiction of all these occupations in Burma strengthened ideas of the country that by then had become common in Britain, the US and elsewhere.

All these images resonated particularly with impressionable young children, who tended to be among the most avid trade and cigarette card collectors.

The invention of photography and lithographic presses, which had greatly stimulated the production of picture postcards and trading cards, also made it possible for both official and private agencies to advertise their goods and services on coloured posters. While they occasionally displayed some originality, the same old themes tended to prevail. For example, in 1928 the British Empire Marketing Board (BEMB) produced three posters by the Burmese artist Ba Nyan under the title 'Burmah: A Land of Rich Resources'. One depicted a rice harvest, complete with bullock cart and half-naked farmers, and a pagoda in the background. Another showed elephants stacking teak logs in front of a timber mill. A third was of 'Rangoon Port'.[432] It featured labourers man-handling bags of rice in small boats, once again with a pagoda in the background. Around the same time, the BEMB also commissioned a poster from the Scottish artist Keith Henderson, showing elephants hauling teak logs through the jungle. Travel to Burma was also promoted on posters, which often highlighted scenes of gilded pagodas, swaying palms and contented villagers. A Bibby Line poster, for example, showed one of its passenger vessels passing a pagoda on its way to 'sunshine'. Another was of a Burmese sailor on a rice boat, wearing a traditional *gaungbaung* headscarf, beside a Bibby ship.[433] The Henderson Line, which also serviced the Britain-Burma route, published posters advertising its services. The company also produced postcards and packs of playing cards showing ships at sea, sometimes with palm trees on a distant shore.[434]

The same broad approach, drawing on clichéd images and well known stereotypes, was followed by other institutions and travel companies. In 1931, for example, the US Navy produced a recruiting poster that used Kipling's popular ballad 'Mandalay' as a hook. The poster's caption began:

> "China 'crost the bay"! A song dear to the hearts of sailormen. It tells of travel and the satisfaction of knowing strange lands and their peoples. Navy men know what it means to go places and do things.[435]

A poster produced in the early 1930s by the noted British artist Percy Padden for the Indian State Railways, with the simple caption "See Burma", depicted a scene on what appears to be the platform of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon. A 1957 poster issued by the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) urged customers to 'Jet your way to Rangoon'. It too featured the Shwedagon Pagoda.[436] One 1960 Pan American Airlines poster showed a massive chinthe in front of an unnamed pagoda, while another Pan American poster produced in 1964 featured a typical Burmese 'beauty' in national costume.[437] A number of more recent travel posters have copied the style and subjects of these originals, reproductions of which are still on sale.

The commercial exploitation of such images helped cement them in the popular imagination, a phenomenon that can also be seen in advertisements for foodstuffs. For example, the use of 'Burma' and 'Mandalay' in the names of condiments was a clear allusion to 'them spicy garlic smells' mentioned by Kipling in his famous ballad. Such references were reinforced by pictorial labels. In a 1907 marketing campaign, for example, Heinz's 'Mandalay Sauce' was presented against a backdrop of elephants and pagodas.[438] The recipe was advertised as coming 'From Far-Off Mandalay', and as having been discovered by 'an English army officer in the Far East'.[439] This was a completely spurious claim that in 1910 prompted the US Board of Food and Drug Inspection to charge the H.J. Heinz Company with false advertising. Unlike Worcestershire Sauce, which was developed from a genuine Indian recipe in the 1830s, the 'rare Oriental savor' of Mandalay Sauce was created in the Heinz kitchens by blending a selection of fruit, vegetables and spices.[440] The label of 'Burma Sauce', made by the London firm of White, Cottell and Company, and popular in Britain between the wars, showed a Burmese girl in traditional dress standing in front of palm trees.[441] Empire Spice Mills, purveyors of Burma Brand Spices, prominently featured a tiger on its labels, despite being established in Chicago in 1937.

These and similar products did more than cater to the acquired Anglo-Indian tastes of Victorian Britain and their counterparts in the US and elsewhere.[442] As Mona Domosh in particular has written, they encapsulated a tourist's view of Burma that was 'exotic and unthreatening'.[443] They invited consumers comfortably ensconced in metropolitan countries to hear 'the East a'callin'', and make a vicarious gastronomic journey away from their

everyday lives to a remote tropical land that, thanks again to Kipling, was forever associated in the public mind with 'the sunshine an' the palm trees, an' the tinkly temple bells'.[444] Jonathan Saha has suggested that consumers may have been looking for a 'taste of empire', rather than of Burma itself, but even so the country's purported connection with these kinds of foods emphasised their 'otherness' and remoteness from ordinary European and American cuisine.[445] By conjuring up Burma and all its accumulated associations, the country's reputation for being different and enticing was confirmed.

In other ways too, the advertising of commercial products and the firms that sold them deliberately evoked Burma, capitalising on the country's reputation for the exotic. For example, 'Burmese' glass tableware and vases, first made in 1885 by the Mount Washington Glass Company of New Bedford in the US, was so named because Queen Victoria once remarked that their opaque peach and yellow glazes 'reminded' her of a Burmese sunset.[446] Never having been to Burma, however, the British monarch can only have known about its glorious 'Eastern' sunsets from reading about them or hearing descriptions by travellers and officials. In 1886, this style of glass, sometimes decorated with painted designs, was licenced to be manufactured in Britain under the name 'Queen's Burmese'.[447] To cite a different kind of example, the exclusive Paris jeweller Bijou Burma, which was established in 1927, was named specifically to evoke the alien mystery of the country and to remind customers of its reputation for precious stones, notably rubies, sapphires and jade. The company aimed its innovative advertising campaigns mainly at celebrities, such as royalty and well-known entertainers, thus raising its public profile, and incidentally that of Burma.[448]

In other ways too, 'Burma' (and its earlier variation 'Burmah'), and the names 'Mandalay' and 'Rangoon', occasionally surfaced in the daily lives of Western consumers.

In Britain, the most obvious example was Burmah Oil, with its distinctive red, blue and white logo. The company was founded as the Rangoon Oil Company in 1886 to exploit the new province's plentiful oil reserves. Its assets in Burma were nationalised in 1962, but by that stage it had grown into a major multinational corporation, controlling Castrol and British Petroleum. It was taken over by Amoco BP in 2000.[449] Also, from 1883, but mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, several British pottery firms, including Royal Albion, Wedgewood, Hammersley, Morgan Wood and Grindley, produced sets of 'Burmah' bone china. In the 1950s, Royal Worcester made a collectible 'Burma boy' figurine and Bossons English Pottery made a 'Burmese lady' wall vase.[450] Both were depicted in an approximation of national dress.[451] In the 1940s and 1950s, London firms like Dobbs and Christy's produced 'Burma Brown' felt hats, and in 1966 a 'Burma' fashion coat by Misty Harbour made its appearance on the catwalks. This is not to forget that, between 1923 and 1963, motorists in the US were kept amused by multiple roadside signs advertising 'Burma-Shave' brushless shaving cream. The firm claimed that one of its 'secret' ingredients came from Burma, hence its name.[452]

The name 'Mandalay' particularly resonated with Western consumers. This was in part due to Kipling's popular ballad, but it was more than that. Somerset Maugham summed up the phenomenon best when he wrote, after his visit to Burma in 1923;

> First of all Mandalay is a name. For there are places whose names from some accident of history or happy association have an independent magic and perhaps the wise man would never visit them, for the expectations they arouse can hardly be realised.[453]

As he went on to say, 'Mandalay has its name; the falling cadence of the lovely word has gathered about itself the chiaroscuro of romance'.[454] This theme was taken up by the travel writer Norman Lewis, who wrote in 1952 that 'In the name there was a euphony that beckoned to the imagination'.[455] Its appeal survived the 'bitter, withered reality', so much so that in the 1970s and 1980s, Royal Doulton potteries produced a range of fine bone china named 'Mandalay'. Spode, Royal Albert and Mason's (in Britain), Royal Schwarzburg and Hutschenreuther (in Germany), Sakura and Mikado (in Japan) and Castleton in the US, among other firms, also released 'Mandalay' tableware collections, seeing little problem in associating Burma's time-worn royal capital with intimations of Western elegance and luxury. The subliminal messages conveyed by such marketing ploys were enough to justify its use.[456]

The name 'Rangoon' did not have the same cachet as 'Mandalay', but it was also used to promote various products. For example, during the 1920s and 1930s, 'Rangoon' featured in several popular songs, the lyricists of the day predictably rhyming the name of the colonial capital city with words like 'moon', 'swoon' and 'lagoon'.[457] It was also attached to tableware collections by Emery, Ridgway and Midwinter. Their designs showed little connection to Burma. The Emery range, produced at Burslem, near Stoke on Trent, between 1878 and 1885, was of glazed earthenware decorated with a transfer-printed, Japanese-inspired scene of birds in flight among trees and flowers. Ridgway's ironstone 'Rangoon' crockery was produced in the 1960s and was decorated in a style reminiscent of the British pop art of the time. The 'Rangoon' stoneware range by Midwinter was produced in Britain between 1979 and 1986, and was decorated with a stylised bamboo motif. After its introduction in 1962, a popular colour for Ford motor vehicles (particularly sports cars like Mustangs) was 'Rangoon Red'. It is not known how this shade (and later variants) came to be named, but it may have been in response to the release by Pontiac in 1959 of a 'Mandalay Red' Bonneville convertible.[458]

A survey of the ways in which Burma's society and culture were perceived in the West, and reflected in Western commerce, during the colonial era and after would not be complete without a brief reference to the public exhibitions that were staged, mainly in Britain but also in continental Europe and the US, after the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (the 'Great Exhibition') opened in London in 1851.

Before the fall of Mandalay in 1885, Lower Burma was included in such exhibitions as a part of British India. After Upper Burma was annexed, the new province was included in a similar fashion, as occurred at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, when a selection of items seized from the royal palace was put on display.[459] After 1937, Burma appeared as a colony in its own right.[460] In different ways, these displays reinforced stereotypical views and strengthened popular misconceptions about Burma and its people. For example, at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 'Burmah' was represented by examples of ivory, metal and teak craftsmanship.[461] In 1896, there was a Burmese village in the Crystal Palace exhibition centre, described in *The Times* newspaper as follows:

> The village, which consists of several huts erected in the native style, has been picturesquely placed under the central dome … [It] has been entirely constructed by the natives, who now inhabit it, and all the materials have been brought from Burma. The Burmese have been collected from all parts of their native land, and may be seen plying their many trades, including the manufacture of brass and silver repousse work for which they are famous. In the theatre at intervals during the day the natives give performances.[462]

In addition, there was an extensive display of 'native workmanship', on loan from private collectors.[463] It included examples of traditional arts and crafts such as lacquerware, tapestry and silk weaving, wood carving and cigar-making. These skills were also briefly mentioned on cigarette cards produced around that time.[464]

A grand Burmese pavilion in the traditional style was erected at the British Empire Exhibition in London in 1924.[465] It was a popular subject for postcards, one of which claimed the exhibit 'represents every branch of commerce and art in Burma'.[466] Once again, there were displays of Burmese handicrafts and, in an obvious counterpoint for visitors, examples of the 'technical progress' that had been achieved under the British, for example in the rice, timber and petroleum industries. A coloured poster produced at the time showed a Burmese (that is, ethnic Burman) man and woman, in full court dress, performing a traditional dance.[467] A second poster depicted elephants hauling teak logs, while a third invited visitors to inspect a facsimile of the defunct Burmese royal court. They were by the British artists T. Martin Jones, R. Pulling and Alexander Jamieson respectively. Another large Burma pavilion was built for the 1938 Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. It was guarded by two massive *chinthe* statues.[468] According to a cigarette card issued by Mitchell and Son that year, the pavilion displayed 'all that the art and science, trade, commerce and industry of the country can show'.[469]

All these exhibits, postcards, trading cards and posters helped to fix in the imagination of Western populations idealised notions of traditional village life in Burma that had largely remained static, while the rest of the country experienced rapid economic and technical advances under British rule.

A notable German contribution to this view was made in 1913, when the circus owner and wild animal dealer Carl Hagenbeck devoted a part of his zoo at Stellingen near Hamburg to a 'Volkerschau Birma', or 'Burma people show'.[470] About 50 Burmese men and women, including a Buddhist monk, were displayed alongside the caged animals. Visitors were encouraged to view them in their 'natural surroundings', including a rural village and 'temple ruins', pursuing traditional pastimes. Part of their attraction was the demonstration of 'native' skills. When he visited the zoo, for example, Kaiser Wilhelm II was treated to a display of Burmese boxing. As Anne Dreesbach has written;

> In a recursive "cycle of stereotypes", the exhibition affirmed and activated the visitors' already ingrained prejudices and encouraged them to form new ones.[471]

The practice of publicly showing 'exotic' and 'primitive' people was not new to Europe, and by the late 19th century 'human zoos' could be found in centres like Paris, Barcelona, Milan, London and New York City. At the great exhibitions too, the 'human ethnological displays' lacked sensitivity. However, the 'Volkerschau Birma' at Hagenbeck's zoo stands out as a particularly egregious example of perceived racial superiority and the exploitation of conquered peoples, who were denied respect and natural human dignity.

Mention should also be made of the private collections of Burmese cultural artefacts and *objets de curiositie* that could be viewed by members of the public in Britain during the 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, in 1826 the naval officer and author Frederick Marryat donated two large Buddhist sculptures to the British Museum.[472] The museum's Trustees turned down an offer of his entire collection of Burmese antiquities and memorabilia, but the following year, after displaying some of them in a public exhibition in London, he donated the remainder to the Royal Asiatic Society, which occasionally put them on show.[473] Another prominent collector of Burmese artefacts was the wealthy tea merchant Frederick Horniman, who travelled extensively through the province in late 1895 and early 1896. He had opened a private museum near London in 1890, and later dedicated an entire room to Burma. According to one observer, the displays of religious objects, royal regalia and weapons projected an image of;

> A country steeped in ancient religious tradition and inhabited by an ostentatious ex-monarchy, diverse and outlandish ethnic minorities, and bellicose communities.[474]

The museum was very popular. In 1895 alone, more than 85,000 members of the public passed through its turnstile.[475]

The displays relating to Burma in British exhibitions and museums, and at major events like the Paris Exposition of 1900, were essentially ethnographic in nature.[476] As Alexandra Green has pointed out, 'the Burmese made items for specific purposes, including religious use, rather than fashioning pieces for display alone'.[477] Indeed, the traditional art of Burma was dismissed by some observers as 'quaint', while others noted 'the decadence of Burmese art', particularly the 'modern monstrosities' that had appeared since the British conquest.[478] The ethnographic view informed the approach of the British Museum, which accepted a range of items from Burma donated by individuals and institutions. The wide variety taken was 'in keeping with the British Museum's self-defined role as a museum of civilization rather than of art'.[479] Most were acquired on an opportunistic basis from former soldiers, merchants and missionaries who had developed a personal interest in Burma's material culture. There was no systematic collecting program.[480] A similar approach was taken by the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), which in 1890 was given the royal regalia seized from the king's palace in Mandalay, and held until then by the Secretary of State for India.[481] The low priority given to Burma was due in part to its perceived unimportance compared to places like India and China. Also, according to Green, 'Burma was perceived in Britain as only half-civilized'.[482]

There were also some collections of Burmese art and artefacts in US institutions. Most were acquired as donations from missionaries, diplomats and others who had lived or worked in the country.[483] Thus the holdings of repositories like the Denison Museum and the Northern Illinois University Art Museum reflected the interests of their major donors, most of whom had focussed their attention on subjects like textiles, lacquerware, religious iconography and traditional weapons.[484] Again, there were no structured collecting programs. For many years, the only exposure Americans had to Burmese culture was through such displays, but they tended to attract the

attention of specialists more than members of the wider public. There was insufficient interest in Burma and its indigenous culture to justify travelling exhibitions, and after the 1962 military coup in Burma bilateral relations between the US and Ne Win's socialist regime were not close enough to permit significant cultural exchanges.[485] An exhibition of Buddhist art held in New York in 2015, under the sponsorship of the Asia Society, was billed as 'the first exhibition in the West focusing on works of art from collections in Myanmar'.[486]

Museum exhibits and other displays gave Burma and the Burmese a tangible presence in the West, albeit a very selective and commodified one. Exhibitions in Britain attracted large numbers of visitors, not only from Britain itself but also from the continent, the US and other places. The 1924 British Empire Exhibition, for example, was the largest of its kind staged anywhere in the world to that time, attracting 27 million visitors.[487] However, these essentially ethnographic displays served mainly to confirm widely-held notions of Burma as picturesque but primitive, an ideal candidate for colonisation and management by the more sophisticated and technically advanced West. As Nicky Level has written, they:

> … projected a subjective, fictional, and fetishized image of reality. An imagery which was predicated on the separation and differentiation of self from other, of the familiar from the exotic, of the progressive, "scientific", civilised West from the "inferior", barbaric East.[488]

They were celebrations of 'the white man's successful transplantation to the furthest reaches of the globe, and his creation there of societies modelled on European lines'.[489] Little, if any, attention was paid to the feelings and aspirations of the Burmese people who, despite being celebrated in public, were not accorded any independent agency.

Whatever the popular reaction to these kinds of displays, to most people they remained interesting distractions from a distant land that most, it was assumed, would never visit. Burma did not become a real place to most Westerners until Japan and a small army of Burmese nationalists invaded the colony in December 1941. Within a year, they had driven out the colonial administration, requiring a major military campaign to restore the status quo ante.

7. The Second World War

> 'Right, now I understand people think you're the Forgotten Army. I understand you all talk about yourselves as the Forgotten Army on the Forgotten Front. I've come here to tell you you're quite wrong. You're not the Forgotten Army on the Forgotten Front. No, make no mistake about it. Nobody's ever *heard* of you!'
>
> Vice-Admiral the Earl Mountbatten of Burma (1941), in
> Richard Hough, *Mountbatten: Hero of Our Time* (1980)

More than any other historical development, the Second World War brought Burma to the attention of populations in Europe, the US and elsewhere, including Britain's colonies and former dominions. In different ways, all were caught up in the conflict, and a number had citizens serving there.[490] The statistics vary greatly, but according to one study there were more than 606,000 men and women in the British Commonwealth forces, although it must be noted that the majority were drawn from India and African colonies like Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya. Another 12,000 Americans served in the wider CBI theatre.[491] Some sources give much higher numbers, still not counting the Chinese and Japanese forces who also fought there. The Burma campaign was a relatively low priority in London and Washington, prompting the tag 'the forgotten front', but it was the longest of the entire war, lasting from December 1941 until August 1945. Also, it was arguably the fiercest and the most varied in terms of the terrain and styles of fighting.[492] Surveying the challenges faced by the Allies, one Canadian war correspondent wrote: 'Whichever way you look at it, militarily, geographically or politically, there are seemingly near insuperable obstacles'.[493] In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the notions of Burma that had taken root in the West before the war were both strengthened and reshaped by the experiences of the participants and the reports that were published 'back home'.[494]

As already noted, war correspondents in the CBI theatre usually described the Burmese landscape in dramatic terms, emphasizing the dense jungle, the rugged mountains and the monsoon rains. Their accounts seemed to be supported by movies made about Burma, notably the 1940 romantic adventure *Moon Over Burma*. As one US Forces publication noted wryly at the time, this led to some rather fanciful notions:

> If you're a newcomer to Assam and Burma, your conception of the jungle probably is a Hollywood-ized prefabricated vision of a wilderness wherein tigers and pythons and cobras lurk behind every vine-entangled tree, and bloodthirsty natives prowl in search of unwary safaris.[495]

Official accounts of the terrain tended to be more nuanced, seeking to correct these impressions and present a more accurate picture. For example, a *Pocket Guide to Burma* issued to all British troops, probably in early 1945, noted that:

> Most people outside Burma get the idea that the whole country is a tangled mass of impenetrable jungle from end to end. If you were one of Wingate's Chindits or have fought your way into the country through the sparsely populated northern hills or the dense coastal rainforests of Arakan, you probably still think so, for you have arrived "the hard way" and seen the worst that will befall you till you reach the borders of Siam. But Burma has very sharply marked physical and climatic regions which differ greatly and have entirely different effects on the men and machines that have to fight through them.[496]

The *Handbook of Burma and Northeastern India*, prepared by the US Army Air Forces Tactical Centre to brief American pilots flying over Burma, made a similar point:

> The vegetation of the region is extremely variable because of the mountainous nature of the country. Within a single area, fifty miles across the Arakan Yoma, vegetation ranges from cold climate types of the high mountains, through semi-desert scrub, down to the thickest kind of tropical jungle.[497]

Official guides like these, however, were rarely read by members of the general public back in the metropolitan countries. This made the sensational pictures of Burma's geography inherited from movies and popular fiction, and repainted by war correspondents, hard to shift, even after those who served there went home and shared their experiences of the country.

Also, the hyperbolic accounts of journalists sometimes appeared to be confirmed by authoritative sources. For example, in 1956 Field Marshall Sir William Slim, who led the Allied Fourteenth Army to a remarkable victory in Burma, published a best-selling memoir of the campaign. In it, he wrote:

> We flew over the Arakan Yomas, and I had my first sight of the jungle-clad hills of Burma. Flying over them you can realise what an obstacle they are to vision, but you cannot really appreciate what an obstacle they are to movement. To do that you must hack and push your way through the clinging, tight-packed greenery, scramble up precipitous slopes and slide down the other side, endlessly, as if you were walking along the teeth of a saw.[498]

The Arakan mountain range (*yoma*) along Burma's west coast typically receives over 39 inches (one metre) of rain a year and is more heavily forested than many other parts of the country. Slim was not exaggerating. As he admitted during the conflict, the jungle 'bewilders, depresses and even frightens us'.[499] Later, he wrote; 'To our men, the jungle was a strange, fearsome place; moving and fighting in it were a nightmare'.[500] In his memoir, Slim tried to dispel some of the myths prevailing about jungle warfare, but statements like these helped confirm the impression given by war correspondents that Burma was covered in 'impenetrable' tropical rain forest, a completely alien environment for Westerners. It was what audiences had come to expect from other sources.

In any case, there was no denying that the challenges posed by Burma's natural environment were immense. A war correspondent who covered the campaign for both British and Australian newspapers described the monsoon in terms that resonated through the Western world:

> Then came the rains. The lead-grey clouds rolled and darkened and lowered. They were torn to ragged shreds by great winds that screamed through the jungle. Day after day, night after night, the rain hammered down, turning trickles into streams, streams into raging, foam-flecked yellow torrents. The jungle became a steaming oven. Ankle-deep dust turned into knee-deep mud.[501]

Despite its cautions against exaggerated fears of the local terrain, one US military handbook warned those working on the Ledo Road:

> Venture a few hundred feet from the highway and you enter a dim, matted world possessed by nature's most vicious beasts, birds, insects and pests. … The jungle, in reality, is tall and dark and silent as death.[502]

As George Forty has written, 'the climate, the terrain, the flora and fauna, all seemed to be waging their own special war against the soldiers of both sides, impersonally'.[503]

In keeping with Burma's dualistic nature, however, there was another kind of reporting that was sent back to the West by war correspondents, which evoked a different response. Two examples stand out. The first was a passage written by the French journalist Eve Curie, who fled Rangoon in 1942 and travelled north with

the retreating British army. Despite the hardships she endured, she could still appreciate Burma's natural beauty as she travelled up the road from Rangoon to Mandalay:

> On both sides of it, defiantly spread under our eyes, was the most beautiful country in the world, which the war affected in no way and which knew nothing of our feuds. The soil, the colour of dark copper, of rust, could hardly be seen under the thickly interlaced creepers, shrubs, and trees. Every hill was a luxuriant cone of jungle, a soft heap of vegetation, alive, like a huge music box, with the insistent songs of birds.[504]

An even better example was an article written by the American Clare Boothe for the illustrated weekly magazine *Life*. Passing through Mandalay during the same chaotic retreat from Burma, she wrote:

> Yesterday, what did I know of Mandalay? Yesterday, to me it was just a Kipling song, an Empire sound. For what do most Americans really know of Mandalay, except this, perhaps: from Moulmein to Mandalay the course of the Empire took its hot triumphant way, when Kipling was a war correspondent given to writing wondrous jungle jingles before this century began. I knew, of course, a few scattered facts that had impinged themselves on my mind through the years: population, 150,000, predominantly Buddhist, famed for its temples and crowded market places.
>
> But Mandalay in my mind was only a shadowy, mysterious Oriental montage. I envisaged the city of Thibaw's evil queen, whose name was Supayalat, full of bustling noisy bazaars where lacy silver and solid gold trinkets, rubies from Magok, sapphires and jades and amber, bright lacquer bowls and carved teak were sold. I saw, in my mind's eye, Buddhist priests, kneeling before the innumerable white pagodas, heard the temple bells, the chant of temple rites, the chug-chug of little steamers on the Irrawaddy, the creaking of the wheels of lazy bullock carts. I fancied the smiling faces of black-haired, sandal-footed, flowery-robed Burmese girls jingling anklets and bracelets ("a-wastin' Christian kisses on an 'eathen idol's foot"). I smelt the fragrance of incense and flowering trees ...[505]

The 'shadowy, mysterious Oriental montage' described by Boothe constituted a comprehensive catalogue of the stereotypical images of Burma that lived in the minds of most Westerners before the war.

Both Curie and Boothe were new to Burma, and the dire circumstances they found themselves in probably heightened their sensitivity to an exotic and unfamiliar landscape. It may also be relevant that neither were combatants, but paid observers writing for Western audiences thousands of miles way. Even so, to quote the novelist Janet Aldis, their views were clearly coloured by 'dreams of the East, vague, inchoate, suffused with the transforming light of ... imagination'.[506]

Another potent source of impressions about Burma during this period was the pictorial supplements found in newspapers and popular magazines. Throughout the war these and other publications, like *The War Illustrated* and *Yank Magazine* showed scenes which, if nothing else, confirmed the by-now-standard Western perception of Burma as a beautiful if rather strange and primitive country.[507] Elephants helping to load equipment into American transport planes, long-eared mules carrying supplies along narrow mountain tracks, British soldiers marching past shapely pagodas, Sherman tanks standing in front of Buddha statues and aircraft flying over snow-clad Himalayan mountain peaks, were all typical fare.[508] The Ledo (later Stilwell) Road from India to China was hailed as an engineering miracle due to the harsh weather and rugged terrain endured by the construction crews.[509] Indeed, the challenges faced by all the Allied forces keeping open the lines of communication were immense.[510] Another subject touched upon in these kinds of publications was Burma's legends, manifested mainly through the *chinthe* statues that guarded many pagodas. The *chinthe* was adopted as a name and unit insignia by General Orde Wingate's famous 'Chindit' long range penetration groups, giving it added exposure in the theatre, and beyond.[511]

The war in Burma was also memorialized in popular songs and music.[512] Not many of these works have survived the passage of time, but back then they not only boosted the morale of the troops but, in many cases, helped to remind the public back home of the conflict raging there. In doing so, they added to Burma's

reputation as a strange, remote and demanding place. For example, one song, titled 'Down by Mandalay', ended with the verse:

> Now when this war is over and the job is done,
> All you lads from Burma go tell it to your son:
> 'Remember the war against the Hun,
> But don't forget the war they won,
> In Asia's south eastern corner
> Against the Rising Sun'.[513]

To take two more examples, in 1945 the duo Nat Temple and Ray Terry composed a tune called 'Burma Road' which, after receiving the 'big band' treatment, became a hit in Britain.[514] In the US the same year, Roy Milton released his musical tribute to the servicemen in the CBI theatre, called 'Burma Road Blues'.[515] Both works were recorded on 78 rpm discs for wider release. The theme of contrasts and curiosities underlying such compositions was also found in 'Yank Meets Native', an article published in *The National Geographic Magazine* in 1945 which described unusual encounters between US servicemen and Asians during the war. Burma was represented by a photograph of an American soldier reading a comic book in front of two bare-footed Kachin children.[516]

When the Second World War broke out, the comfortable notion that Burma was peopled by gentle Buddhists happy to live under a paternalistic colonial administration was immediately challenged. In both public statements and official reports, the British described the local population as 'not particularly interested in politics', and prepared to await the outcome of the conflict.[517] However, some elements – Slim estimated about five per cent of the total – were 'actively and violently hostile'.[518] Most came from the ethnic Burman majority, which was soon singled out for criticism. In 1942, for example, *The War Illustrated* published a story about the fall of Rangoon which referred to 'Asiatic quislings whose emotions against the whites have been worked up by the Japanese radio'.[519] There were also reports that unarmed refugees making their way to India were attacked, robbed and even murdered by 'cowardly, brutal' Burmese.[520] Even after the war was over, Prime Minister Winston Churchill viewed the nationalist leader (and later independence hero) Aung San as a 'traitor rebel leader' and the organizer of a 'Quisling army', 'whose hands were dyed with British blood and loyal Burmese blood'.[521] By contrast, many of the ethnic minorities, notably the Karen, Chin and Kachin, 'remained faithful to the British at great cost to themselves even during the Japanese occupation', again to quote Slim.[522] These groups formed the core of several military units which became renowned for their bravery and jungle fighting abilities.[523]

Perceptions of the Burmese were also influenced by official US reports. One in particular springs to mind. In 1943, the British social anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer was commissioned by the Office of War Information (OWI) to write a 'diagnostic study' of the 'Burmese personality', about which the US armed forces at the time knew almost nothing. He concluded, largely on the basis of a few interviews, some secondary sources and an idiosyncratic interpretation of Sigmund Freud's controversial teachings, that 'the fundamental Burmese character was founded on the factual and psychological dominance of women'.[524] To Gorer's mind, they managed the household and most family business, and generally dominated society, but without claiming dominance. By contrast, Burmese men were seen as weak and unreliable. Gorer felt that they were vain, lazy, pampered and gossipy. Also, they were unable to resist temptation, enjoyed 'the ecstasy of violence', took pleasure in cruelty and demonstrated theatrical exhibitionism. Gorer sheeted these traits home to infantile trauma, lax toilet training and distorted gender roles.[525] Considered overall, it was a pretty damning indictment of Burmese society.

Gorer's monograph was initially given a 'Confidential' security classification and its distribution confined to official circles. Even so, it circulated widely. According to Peter Mandler, it was 'read avidly across a variety of agencies, used as background for propaganda and as cues to intercultural training in civil affairs schools'.[526] It was probably also a source for the *Pocket Guide to Burma* prepared by the US Army's Information Branch for American service personnel, advising what they might expect when they entered Burma, after it was liberated.[527] In that sense, its conclusions were shared with thousands of servicemen and women. Also, in 1943 a slightly revised version of Gorer's report was released in mimeographed form under the title *Burmese Personality* by the Institute of Intercultural Relations, a small non-profit organisation created by a group of

American scholars who had pioneered the study of national character through anthropological methods.[528] Not surprisingly, the report attracted mixed responses, but it was picked up after the war and helped inform an academic debate about the character of the Burmese people and the nature of their culture.[529]

These rather esoteric discussions contributed to the broader public discourse but, as Gorer had found, before the war very few Americans knew anything, or cared at all, about Burma or its people. Indeed, he was hard put to find anyone in the US worth interviewing for his OWI study.[530] This was also the experience of the linguist William S. Cornyn, who was commissioned by the US Army in 1941 to devise an intensive Burmese language course for servicemen likely to be posted to the CBI theatre. He was only able to track down a single native Burmese speaker in the US to help him.[531]

Also, at higher policy levels, there was little inclination to extend the US's involvement in Burma beyond the immediate demands of the war, and support for Chiang Kai-shek's *Kuomintang* regime in China. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), for example, had little time for the Burmese nationalists under Aung San who had been demanding the country's independence from Britain, and later supported the Japanese invasion of the colony. In a letter to Winston Churchill dated 16 April 1942, FDR wrote:

> I have never liked Burma or the Burmese … And you people must have had a terrible time with them for the last fifty years … I wish you could put the whole bunch of them into a frying pan with a wall around it and let them stew in their own juice.[532]

Roosevelt was happy to help Britain arrest Burma's travelling Prime Minister, U Saw, for secretly communicating with the Japanese.[533] The US also passed on intelligence about other contacts between the Burmese nationalists and Japan. FDR was no fan of imperialism and throughout the war pushed Churchill to grant India its independence.[534] However, he was keen to develop his broader relationship with the British Prime Minister and siding with him over Burma assisted this strategy. He also knew that there was no support in the US for the nationalists. The small number of Americans familiar with Burma also appear to have had a low opinion of the country's political class, encouraging Geoffrey Gorer's view that 'In public station they are irresponsible and capricious'.[535]

8. After the war

> Most people are influenced far more than they would care to admit by novels, serial stories, films and so forth, and from this point of view the worst books are often the most important because they are usually the ones that are read earliest in life. It is probable that many people who consider themselves extremely sophisticated and 'advanced' are actually carrying through life an imaginative background which they acquired in childhood.
>
> George Orwell
> 'Boys Weeklies'
> *Horizon*, March 1940

After the Second World War, postcards, trading cards and stereo viewing cards did not disappear but, with changes in taste, technology and marketing techniques, they were no longer as critical in forming popular opinion. To cater to a more literate and mobile society, printed matter became more important. The war became a staple subject for memoirs, novels and short stories, as former servicemen and women, among others, sought to capitalize on their experiences. This was important for, as Josef Silverstein wrote with Burma in mind;

> Fiction provides a popular entryway for the "average" reader to reach beyond his normal range of knowledge and imagination; it is more likely he will have read a novel or short story rather than a history or scholarly work and it is from this source that he will have formed his ideas and adopted his stereotypes.[536]

In addition, there were numerous stories about wartime Burma in the cheap illustrated magazines and 'glossies' that were increasingly taking the place of the pulps.[537] Comic books, which had first achieved prominence in the 1930s, and paperbacks produced for the mass market, also proved to be powerful vectors for images of Burma.[538] This process was greatly assisted by the movies set in Burma that appeared in the 1950s and 1960s.

Looking mainly at novels written before and after the Second World War, Josef Silverstein wrote that:

> Burma's Western interpreters have, in the main, tried to represent accurate descriptions and true representations of the people and the country.[539]

However, as he admitted, they did not place Burmese characters at the centre of their stories, which focussed on Westerners adapting, or not as the case may be, to the challenges of living in a strange and demanding environment. Where Burmese figured in the narrative they were mostly Western-educated, English-speaking members of the elite. Occasionally, Burma's broader society and culture were mentioned, but this was usually to provide a colourful backdrop to expatriate dramas. They were rarely treated sympathetically. More often, Burma was described in terms which were designed to excite wonder, consolidating its reputation as an exotic tropical land of extremes.

In the first few decades after the Japanese surrender in 1945 there was an outpouring of novels written about the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific, a disproportionate number of which focussed on operations in Burma and China.[540] Special attention was paid to irregular units with striking names like the Chindits, Merrill's Marauders, the Kachin Rangers and the Flying Tigers.[541] Among the most evocative of these works were Donald Eyre's *Foxes Have Holes*, David King's *The Brave and the Damned*, and Tom Chamales' *Never So Few*.[542] Such stories emphasised the difficult terrain in which the soldiers and airmen (of both sides) had to operate, the trying weather conditions and other hardships. Attention was also paid to the physical and mental toll that such

conditions took on the men in Burma, as shown for example in Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy*.[543] Little attention was paid to the local population, although some novels included passing references (both positive and negative) to 'the natives'. These included H.E. Bates' *The Purple Plain* and Francis Clifford's *A Battle is Fought to be Won*.[544] One notable Japanese contribution to the genre was *The Burmese Harp*, a children's story about the war written by Michio Takeyama and published in 1946.[545] It drew attention to the tragedy of war and the need for some kind of reckoning.

As Silverstein has written, quality fiction such as this could provide 'an important prism through which the strands of light propel images and ideas of Burma to the reader that help him to understand aspects of Burmese life and culture'.[546] They may have had the same basic ingredients, and reflected many of the same stock images, but this cannot be said of the thousands of cheap magazines, war comics and 'airport' novels produced for mass markets, mainly in Britain and the US, during the 1950s and 1960s.[547] Their readers were offered a highly subjective view of Burma, through a glass darkly. They were a reminder that, as Robin Winks wrote in his article on 'The Sinister Oriental':

> Popular fiction, and with respect to Asia thriller fiction in particular, simply reaches far larger audiences than serious fiction can ever hope to do. A Gresham's law of literature appears to apply.[548]

As Winks went on to say, this does not mean that the so-called lesser literature always has a greater social impact, which in any case is notoriously difficult to measure, but given the usually higher sales figures it must be counted as having a significant influence on popular attitudes.

After 1945, the dime novels and pulp fiction of the pre-war era evolved into cheap illustrated magazines, also intended for mass audiences. Even the so-called 'girlie' magazines of the period included adventure stories, which gave wide scope for material about Burma. They ranged from breathless 'true' tales, such as J.H. ('Elephant Bill') Williams' 1954 story 'Elephant Man from Burma' in *Men*, and 'How Merrill's Brave Marauders Were Sold Down the River' by Howard Apter in a 1962 edition of *Male*, to obviously fabricated accounts such as Ben Giordano's '$16,000,000 in Rubies and It's Still There!' in the April 1964 issue of *Real Men*.[549] A 1957 story in *Man's Conquest* about travel through a leech-infested part of the country was advertised as 'Flesh-Feast for the Beasts of Burma'.[550] There were also numerous stories that set real or imagined wartime adventures in Burma within the soft-core sexual milieu of these magazines, such as Leon Lazarus's 'Yank Who Led Burma's Nude Nymph Commandos', published in *For Men Only* in April 1964, 'and 'I Led the Airborne Nymphs of Burma' by Rod Summers, which appeared in *World of Men* in June 1964.[551] In 1969, *True Action* magazine carried a story called 'He Lived with the Devil Love Worshippers of North Burma'.[552] There were many others in a similar vein.

As the titles of these stories suggest, the physical setting was often less important than their (often implied) content. In their own ways, however, they all helped to emphasise Burma's exoticism and remoteness from the world of the average city-bound Westerner. The same phenomenon can be seen in many of the mass-market paperback books about Burma that were produced in Britain and the US during the same period.

Burmese Days, George Orwell's 1934 indictment of imperial rule in Burma, was re-released as a Popular Library paperback in the US in 1952, but with the sensational tagline: 'A saga of jungle hate and lust'. The book's cover showed a European couple passionately embracing while a half-naked Burmese girl looked on.[553] *Opium Venture*, by the British consular official Gerald Sparrow, was about a 'savage and sensuous' princess who controlled the opium trade in Burma's Shan States. The cover of the 1960 paperback showed a glamorous Asian girl holding a whip in front of two men held in bamboo cages.[554] Edward Aarons' 1962 suspense novel *Assignment Burma Girl*, about the search for two Americans missing in the jungle, has a half-naked Burmese girl on its front cover.[555] Yet another barely-clad Burmese girl graces the cover of F. Van Wyck Mason's 1963 thriller *Trouble in Burma*, about a secret agent sent to destroy a lost missile.[556] To give one more example of this genre, the Asian woman on the cover of *The House of Bamboo*, by Charles De Verteuil, is almost fully clothed, in what appears to be a Chinese costume. However, the paperback proclaims on its cover: 'In a Burmese girl's warm, seductive beauty he found escape from the flames of forbidden desire ... and the nightmare past'.[557]

Such pictures and blurbs were doubtless intended to promote sales at a time when the market was flooded by cheap paperbacks, many of them thrillers set in a sexualised context. In Britain, the US and elsewhere they were readily available at newsstands, railway stations and airports.[558] However tenuous the link may have been, those books relating to Burma helped spread the idea of a remote tropical country full of violent men and lustful women—or lustful men and violent women.[559]

During the Second World War, Burma was occasionally mentioned in the comics. For example, in 1942 *Real Heroes* featured the commander of the Flying Tigers, and in 1944 a Buck Ryan strip called 'Spies in Burma' was published in the *Daily Mirror*.[560] However, during the 1950s this genre came into its own, as comic books like *All-American Men of War* increasingly claimed the attention of the public. From 1958, comics such as *War Picture Library* and, from 1961, *Commando Comics* flooded British markets.[561] During the 1960s and 1970s, *War Picture Library* released up to 12 titles a year and was enormously popular.[562] It later absorbed companion titles like *Air Ace Picture Library* (1960-1970) and *Action Picture Library* (1969-1970). Some comics, like *Air Battle Library* and *Combat Picture Library*, were also printed in Australia and New Zealand to cater to the large dominion markets. Many of these publications carried stories about the war in Burma. For example, *Battle Picture Weekly*, published from 1975 to 1988, became well known for a series titled 'Darkie's Mob', described by one historian of the genre as 'nothing less than a comic strip version of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', set in Burma during the war.[563] One *Commando* comic exploited Burma's reputation for precious stones, weaving the search for a ruby into a war story.[564]

At least in the early post-war period, several of the authors and artists employed to produce these comics had served in the CBI theatre, and were able to give stories set in Burma a degree of accuracy and immediacy.[565] They also wove into their narratives references to real places, real battles and real settings, such as the colonial capital Rangoon, the retreat from Burma in 1942, the Chindit long range penetration groups and the guerrilla war waged against the Japanese by the Chin, Kachin and Karen 'hill tribes'.[566] Even so, when Burma featured as a backdrop to tales of wartime derring-do, it was usually portrayed in familiar terms. For example, in 1969 the introduction to a story titled 'Burma Guerrilla' began:

> One of the toughest theatres of war in World War II was Burma. It is mountainous, has few roads or railways, and much of it is covered by dense malarial jungle. Torrential rains for six months of the year turn whole areas into seas of mud. Not for nothing did the troops of the Fourteenth Army call it 'The Green Hell'.[567]

Young readers could be forgiven for concluding (as did many veterans at the time) that Burma's natural environment posed the Allies greater challenges than their Japanese adversaries.

Even those comic books that were not devoted to war stories tended to reflect familiar themes. The old tropes were still proving useful well into modern times, albeit occasionally reinforced by other material. In 1961, for example, there was a story in *My Greatest Adventure* comics about a 'tiger-man'.[568] In 1986, a story in the *G.I. Combat* series titled 'Dead Winner' described a group of mercenaries who, evading the police in the Bay of Bengal, sailed up the Chindwin River (somehow skipping 600 kilometres of the Irrawaddy River). In a bizarre mix of literary clichés with both Asian and African overtones, there was a missionary sick with fever, a faithful retainer, a damsel in distress, 'treacherous jungle', poisonous snakes, 'native drums', witch doctors and head hunters.[569] In 'The Search for Byron', published in 1996, the costumed comic strip character known as The Phantom ('the ghost who walks') went to southern Burma to rescue a missing aviator from 'head hunters'.[570] He revealed that he had been there before, sorting out 'a nasty tribal war'. He described Burma in (by now) conventional terms as 'a terrible country … wild animals, thick jungle, incredible heat, ferocious natives'.[571] Another Phantom comic highlighted Burma's drug trade.[572] It all made for great entertainment, but bore little relation to the real Burma.

Also worth mentioning in this regard are graphic novels.[573] They date back to the 1930s, but were only recognised as a distinct genre of popular literature in the mid-1960s.[574] An early example relating to Burma appeared in 1944, when a US missionary organisation published the history, 'told in pictures', of a hospital built in the Shan States by Gordon Seagrave, the so-called 'Burma Surgeon'.[575] Since the 1988 uprising, Burma has featured in nearly two dozen graphic novels, many produced in Europe.[576] Some had a strong historical flavour,

referencing the Second World War or the more recent struggle for democracy in Burma.[577] A few of the latter took the then opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, *La Dame de Rangoon*, as their focal point.[578] However, most graphic novels about Burma were intended simply to entertain, and exploited the popular image of the country as a remote land of tropical jungles, wild animals and dangerous *dacoits*. It was thus well suited to be a backdrop for romantic adventure stories about lost treasure, drug warlords and secret military bases. Hence productions like the 1976 *Adventure in Burma*, and the two-volume *Mysteries in Burma*, published in 2004 and 2006 respectively.[579] One of the Largo Wynch thriller stories, titled *The Hour of the Tiger*, was set in Burma and featured the usual mix of jungles, girls and violence.[580] Even James Bond went there, in a 1983 Swedish graphic novel.[581]

In both comics and graphic novels about Burma, the way that the country was represented by artists varied greatly. Jungle scenes and small rural villages were shown accurately enough in war comics, possibly because the artists were drawing on their own experiences. However, in other comics there were serious gaffes. On the front cover of the *G.I. Combat* comic 'Dead Winner', for example, the 'natives' shown following the mercenaries through the Burmese jungle appear to be Zulus. In 'The Search for Byron', the 'natives' encountered by The Phantom also seem to be based on African models, with their curious headgear, grass skirts, leg tassels and long spears. In the erotic graphic novel *Hot Nights in Rangoon*, by J.H. Haupeur, there are occasional references to real places, such as the Inya Lake Hotel, and there is one panel showing a chinthe beside a pagoda, but the scenes of Burmese city life were a strange mixture of oriental clichés, with echoes of 1930s Shanghai and modern Bangkok. The script on the street signs in Rangoon and Mandalay was not recognisable as any form of known writing system. [582] In contrast, the artwork in the French-language graphic novels by Yann and Roland Hugault, such as *Burma Banshees*, was in most ways meticulously correct.[583] Similar efforts were made to depict colonial Burma accurately in the *Little England* series of graphic novels, produced in Belgium in 2017 and 2018.[584]

Accurate or not, and each in their own way, all these illustrations helped to create vivid and often lasting impressions of Burma. In other ways too, the country's reputation for the exotic and bizarre was kept alive in the mind of the average Westerner, including easily influenced children. One obvious example was the long-running and multi-faceted enterprise known as *Ripley's Believe it or Not!*

From small beginnings as a newspaper panel in 1918, *Ripley's Believe it or Not!* evolved into an international franchise producing magazines, books, radio programs, short movies and, from 1949, its own television series. Burma featured in these productions on several occasions. In 1954, for example, the magazine ran a story about 'the women who smoke through their cheeks'. The story claimed that 'The Palaung girls of Burma cut holes in both their cheeks to hold their foot-long cheroots'.[585] The Padaung 'giraffe girls' who wore brass rings around their necks featured a number of times and were even displayed as wax figures in Ripley's 'odditoriums' (museums). Several stories covered Burmese pythons, which grew up to 25 feet (7.62 metres) long and enlarged their own hearts by 40% when eating. One item was about an albino specimen. Another story published by Ripley's was about a Burmese king whose subjects were reportedly required to pronounce all 69 syllables of his name whenever he was addressed.[586] The 'gravity-defying' Kyaiktiyo pagoda also received the Ripley's treatment.[587] So too did the 'Lai Tu Chin tribe', whose women cover their faces with tattoos when they come of age.[588] A more recent Ripley's book claimed that 'The Simpson's Movie', released in 2007, was banned in Burma because the colours red and yellow 'aren't allowed in movies'.[589]

These widely-disseminated, if boldly stated and poorly explained 'facts' inevitably added to Burma's colourful reputation. Perhaps the most indelible impressions of the country during the post-war period, however, came from the cinema.

Between 1940 and 1962, almost all of the 15 or so feature movies made by the major Western studios, and set in Burma, were war stories.[590] These included *Objective Burma*, starring Errol Flynn (1945), *The Purple Plain* starring Gregory Peck (1954), *Never So Few* with Frank Sinatra (1959) and *Merrill's Marauders* starring Jeff Chandler (1962).[591] There was a Burmese heroine in *The Purple Plain*, and *Merrill's Marauders* included a scene in which some local villagers shared their meagre food supplies with American soldiers.[592] However, few of these movies gave a realistic portrayal of Burma, its people, or the war.[593] Indeed, *Objective Burma* was considered so misleading that Fourteenth Army veterans protested and it had to be withdrawn from British

theatres.[594] Also, the studios were still fixed on the idea of a beautiful but rugged country cursed with intolerable weather, inhabited by primitive natives and savage animals. Occasionally this theme was taken too far, as in *Escape to Burma*, a 1955 movie in which Barbara Stanwyck played the manager of a teak plantation in what was described on the movie's publicity posters as 'the hot green hell of the Burma jungle'. The movie contains a memorable scene in which the heroine encounters a chimpanzee, which is native to Africa, and an orangutan, which is only found in Indonesia.[595]

It might be noted in passing that Western countries were not the only ones that peddled clichéd images of Burma for public consumption around this time. Between 1948, when it regained its independence, until the mid-1970s, the Burmese government promoted many of the same themes. Until the Union of Burma Bank introduced a new range of banknotes in 1972, for example, the country's paper currency repeatedly featured pictures of rice boats sailing on the Irrawaddy River, women spinning silk, elephants hauling teak logs, women planting rice and farmers ploughing their fields with bullocks.[596] It was not until the issue of a new 20 kyat note in 1965 that the currency acknowledged the country's attempts to adopt mechanised farming methods. After 1972, most of these images were abandoned, although the 90 kyat note issued in 1987 again depicted a farmer and his bullock.[597] This pattern was not repeated on the country's postage stamps, which tended to favour political themes, but occasionally issues included a rural scene or a reference to traditional cottage industries.[598] In their own ways, all these pictures reflected the tropes found in the West, which was already primed from a wide range of sources to receive them.

In these and other ways, large and small, the notion of Burma as a land of jungles, elephants, paddy fields, pagodas and pretty girls was reinforced in the minds of Western populations.[599] As a result, whenever people in places as far apart as Europe, the US, Australia, Canada or New Zealand were reminded of Burma, however fleetingly and whatever the context, their initial mental responses were coloured by the stereotypes which had become familiar and widely accepted. Burma was reduced in publications to simply being a 'republic of rice and rubies', or an 'eternally exotic land of pagodas and palaces'.[600] From the 1960s through to the 1980s, reminders of Burma became increasingly rare, as General Ne Win's authoritarian government adopted policies that favoured economic autarky and strict neutrality in foreign affairs. As the country withdrew into relative isolation, and actively discouraged foreign contacts, so it faded from public view in the West. Increasingly, it became known as an 'unknown paradise' that was 'beyond the reach of Western visitors'.[601] In 1979, the *Lonely Planet Guide* pronounced it 'far from the easiest or most comfortable country in Asia to visit'.[602] In the mid-1980s, Pico Iyer called socialist Burma 'the dotty eccentric of Asia, the queer maiden aunt who lives alone and whom the maid has forgotten to visit … Time itself had been sentenced to life imprisonment and History was held under house arrest'.[603]

During this period, Burma did not often warrant stories in the mainstream news media, nor was the subject of newsreels and feature movies.[604] Even academic studies of Burma fell into abeyance, as Western scholars and students turned their attention to places that were more accessible.[605] In 1986, the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars in Washington DC conducted an assessment of Burma studies worldwide, and concluded that;

> Although research in political science, history and linguistics has proceeded, serious, sustained scholarship, as measured by current research on other Southeast Asian countries, has been difficult.[606]

The Centre also noted that:

> While the number of people working on Burma is limited, it could be argued that it accurately reflects the opportunities and current demand for outside knowledge about Burma. Tucked away between India, China and Thailand in self-imposed isolation, Burma, at least for now, has dropped from the modern consciousness except as an exotic destination for hardy travellers.[607]

Occasionally, however, Burma intruded into the daily lives of Westerners in ways that could trigger memories, reawaken old images, and polish old misconceptions.

These incidental reminders of Burma took many forms. In 1948, for example, the Vulcan Foundry in Britain advertised its railway locomotives by publishing a picture of an engine steaming past the Shwedagon Pagoda.[608] The elephant that paraded through Washington as the Republican Party's official mascot, on the occasion of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's inauguration in 1953, was named 'Burma'.[609] A number of board games popular in the 1950s and 1960s drew on Burmese scenes and, it was claimed, local traditions and legends.[610] It is still possible to buy jigsaw puzzles based on a painting by Talbot Kelly of the old royal palace in Mandalay (destroyed during the Second World War), and hand-coloured prints of Burmese women in national dress, or spinning silk.[611] Between 1969 and 1986, Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth rode a horse named 'Burmese' at the annual Trooping the Colour ceremony in London.[612] In 1973, the queen ordered a tiara from the jewellers Garrard and Company, set with 96 rubies given to her by the Burmese people on the occasion of her marriage in 1947.[613] She wears it to state functions, its reputedly mystical Burmese connection exciting the interest of tabloid journalists.[614] There are still calls for the return of the 'Nga Mouk' ruby taken from the Burmese royal family in 1886, and reportedly added to the British crown jewels.[615]

To a certain extent, the name 'Burma' has now fallen out of fashion, and in any case was officially replaced by 'Myanmar' in 1989. However, 'Mandalay' remains popular, lending itself to casinos, holiday resorts, shipping firms, musical groups and other commercial enterprises. In various ways, all these companies and institutions have been trading on Burma's colourful reputation and, by its exploitation, perpetuating it. The logo of Mandalay Pictures, for example, is a tiger, and the logo of Mandalay Road wines is an elephant. Both are classic symbols of Eastern exoticism.[616]

9. Burma today

> You'll most likely know it as Myanmar, but it will always be Burma to me.
>
> J. Peterman
> 'The Foundation', *Seinfeld*, 1996

The ways in which Western populations have viewed modern Burma (known since 1989 as Myanmar) and how the country has been represented in popular culture over the past 75 years are subjects for a separate research paper. However, it may be worth briefly surveying the field as a way of highlighting the similarities, and the differences, between the colonial past and the present day. Such links can be found in many forms. For example, one notable example of continuity was the construction of a Burma pavilion, in the classic architectural style, at the Expo 67 International and Universal Exposition in Montreal.[617] Most other countries represented at the fair chose to highlight their modernity and advertise their readiness to embrace the future. However, reflecting the country's historical conservatism, and echoing Burma's presence at exhibitions in Britain and elsewhere during the colonial era, the Rangoon government chose to display the country's natural resources, emphasise its traditional culture (including its arts and crafts) and highlight its national cuisine.[618] As Pico Iyer once noted, 'Burma had long lived in the past tense', but the Expo 67 display was a deliberate look backwards, albeit to a past with which most Westerners would have been familiar, thanks to the stereotypes already formed by the vehicles of popular culture.[619]

A good example of how some perceptions have changed is the way that Burmese Buddhism is now viewed by many in the West. At first, Buddhism was seen by Christian missionaries as heathen idolatry. As already noted, towards the end of the 19th century a more tolerant view prevailed and it acquired a gentler reputation. This survived for decades, with Burma's Theravada tradition held up as an example of the oldest and purest form of Buddhism.[620] Few argued with the idea that Burmese monks were 'the embodiment of good and holiness, living the noblest and most meritorious life a man can live'.[621] Such was Burma's reputation as a devout Buddhist country that, during the 1950s and early 1960s, it attracted Westerners keen to study Buddhist scriptures and meditation techniques.[622] A few even exported these teachings to other countries.[623] The key role played by a peaceful, tolerant humanist philosophy in Burmese culture was noted in academic studies and travelogues, and seemed confirmed by the 2007 'saffron revolution' when thousands of monks demonstrated in the streets, demanding lower prices and democratic freedoms.[624] This image was shattered, however, by the emergence around 2012 of an extremist religious movement in Burma, the *pongyi* at its head earning himself the title, in the Western media, of 'the Buddhist bin Laden'.[625] It claimed wide support for its racist and ultra-nationalist views. The disillusionment with Burmese Buddhism that followed became even greater after 2016, when some prominent monks supported atrocities perpetrated against the Muslim Rohingyas in Arakan State.[626]

These developments took place in a turbulent period during which Burma underwent major political, social and economic changes, prompting increased attention from governments, international organisations and other observers in the West.

After the 1988 pro-democracy uprising thrust Burma into the world's headlines, there arose a global activist movement aimed at helping the Burmese people in their struggle for fundamental human rights. In large part by using modern communications technology, this popular movement was remarkably successful in highlighting the country's many internal problems and mobilising support for, among other things, a more democratic government. An enormous volume of material of all kinds was produced to support this campaign, and international efforts were made to publicise other issues, like the country's interminable civil wars and, in 2016 and 2017, the plight of the Muslim Rohingyas. The West began to acquire a more balanced appreciation of the country and its people. However, even then, Burma's association with exotic phenomena and unusual behaviour (both real and imagined) continued to capture the imagination of the public. At times, particular examples

overshadowed political developments, prompting the recall of the old tropes and strengthening the classic stereotypes. At times, this pattern saw the revival of implicit claims to the West's cultural superiority, as revealed by the patronising nature of the descriptions given in the news media of traditional beliefs and customs.[627]

In 1948, for example, Burma formally regained its independence from Great Britain at 04:20 AM, a time deemed auspicious by astrologers consulted for the occasion. Prime Minister U Nu, who was ousted by General Ne Win in a military coup in 1962, was widely seen as superstitious and unworldly. In 1961, he ordered the construction of 60,000 sand pagodas around the country 'to avert impending dangers and to achieve complete peace and tranquillity in the Union'.[628] The government's instructions for the construction and consecration of the pagodas were based on the number nine. Ne Win too was very superstitious, and reportedly relied heavily on astrologers and numerologists for guidance in both his personal and official lives.[629] It was said, for example, that he walked backwards over bridges for good luck, bathed in dolphin's blood to extend his life to 90, shot his own reflection in a mirror to guard against assassination, and ordered his ministers to eat fish soup for three days in order to alleviate poverty in Burma.[630] In 1987, he reportedly ordered the issue of two new banknotes with denominations adding up to nine, his lucky number.[631] So widespread were these stories that some Western observers claimed that, under Ne Win, 'mysticism became part of national policy'.[632]

The leader of the military government after 1992, Senior General Than Shwe, was reputed to be even more superstitious than Ne Win. He was also reported to be a strong believer in *yadaya*, or traditional practices designed to ward off ill fortune.[633] It has been claimed, for example, that he practiced magic rituals, possibly even including human sacrifice and cannibalism, to prevent challenges to his authoritarian rule.[634] The decision to construct a new capital at Naypyidaw, and the precise time and date in 2005 for the transfer of the government from Rangoon, were by most accounts based on the advice of astrologers.[635] Such beliefs were not confined to senior members of the armed forces. In 2007, for example, a group of exiles and pro-democracy activists sent items of women's underwear to Burmese embassies around the world, in the belief that they would reduce the regime's *hpoun*, or spiritual power.[636] The generals too may have subscribed to a belief in the debilitating effect of 'unclean' clothing. When Burma was under military rule it was widely rumoured that, before a foreign envoy visited the country, an article of female underwear or a piece of a pregnant woman's *longyi* was hidden in the ceiling of the visitor's hotel suite, to weaken their *hpoun*, and thus their negotiating position.[637] According to the Rangoon gossip mill, in 2003 Burma's prime minister dressed as a woman and chanted arcane spells in order to undermine Aung San Suu Kyi's *hpoun*.[638]

Westerners tended to dismiss or even mock such beliefs, but supernatural influences and magical omens were credited with considerable power by many Burmese, including members of the military government. For example, in 1989 there were reports from across Burma that Buddha statues were oozing blood and swelling across their chests. These signs were read as 'portents of the military regime's demise and imminent political chaos'.[639] The swelling across the chests was interpreted as meaning that Burma's next ruler would be a woman, a clear reference to Aung San Suu Kyi. The generals were sufficiently disturbed by these rumours to restrict access to certain pagodas and to remove particular Buddha images. In 2009, a pagoda collapsed just a few weeks after it had been blessed in the presence of the wife of the country's most senior general, who had donated a new *hti* (umbrella) to be installed at the top of the pagoda. The wife's visit and offering were publicised in the state news media, but the pagoda's collapse was not, apparently because the military regime feared the disaster would be interpreted as a reflection on her husband's authoritarian rule. Natural phenomena too could be considered omens. For example, Cyclone Nargis, which killed 140,000 people in 2008, was seen by many as heralding the fall of the military regime, or was at least a divine comment on the regime's rigged constitutional referendum that year.[640] In 2010, the military regime banned public speculation that a solar eclipse would bring 'bad times'.[641]

Such stories circulated widely in the West, adding to Burma's aura of mystery and exoticism. Over the years, there have been numerous reports in the Western news media and in online fora to the effect that 'There is no country in Asia more superstitious than Burma', and 'There perhaps is not a nation in the world so given to superstition as the Burmese'.[642] These statements added to the country's reputation for 'otherness' and gave greater credibility to earlier, oft-repeated tales of curious beliefs, strange customs and unusual behaviour.

After the dramatic events of 1988, there was a steady drum-beat of reports in the international news media about human rights abuses and civil unrest, some observers recalling earlier descriptions of Burma as a 'landscape of fear'.[643] In the activist literature, UN reports and official statements by many foreign governments, Burma's problems were outlined in stark terms. Than Shwe and the military regime were described in ways that recalled comments made in the 19th century British press about the reputedly 'dull and stupid' King Thibaw and his 'violent, tyrannical and cruel' wife Supayalat.[644] The public's eye also focused on attractive, Oxford-educated opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Held under house arrest for nearly 15 years, she became a potent symbol of the peaceful struggle for democratic change and, as a consequence, the target of official propaganda campaigns. Her marriage to an Englishman, for example, prompted the military regime to draw unfavourable comparisons between her and Rudyard Kipling's totemic 'Burma girl', who was seen to have chosen a foreigner over her own people.[645] In Western countries, however, Aung San Suu Kyi was accorded the status of a secular saint and showered with prestigious prizes and awards.

Inside Burma, pictures of Aung San Suu Kyi were banned by the military government, but outside it her image adorned countless magazine covers, posters, T-shirts and lapel badges.[646] During a concert tour in 2009, the Irish rock band U2 encouraged audiences to wear paper Aung San Suu Kyi face masks when it sang "Walk On', a song written in 2001 dedicated to the Nobel Peace Prize winner and the fight for human rights in Burma. A 2009 poster of Aung San Suu Kyi by the American artist Shepard Fairey, titled 'Freedom to Lead', became almost as famous as his 2008 poster of Barack Obama. In 2011, Fairey used the same 'sunburst halo' motif to create a poster for a hagiographical movie about Aung San Suu Kyi directed by Luc Besson.[647] After her official rehabilitation that year, Aung San Suu Kyi's image was added to a wide range of consumer goods, both inside Burma and outside it, including calendars, tea towels, mugs, and key rings. The collapse of her international reputation in 2017, following her refusal to condemn atrocities against the Rohingyas by Burma's armed forces, saw sales of such items in Western countries dramatically fall.[648] Inside Burma, however, Aung San Suu Kyi still enjoys wide support and her image still adorns many trinkets and collectibles.

When she was under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi actively discouraged tourism, apparently to deny the military regime international recognition and foreign exchange.[649] Advertisements by travel agencies during this period were comparatively muted, but they continued to appear. At times, this almost amounted to a campaign of deception. As Debbie Lisle wrote in 2006, 'In its infantile, isolated and nostalgic condition, Burma is depicted as "quirky", beguiling", "wistful" and "alluring" rather than as a country that has, since independence, been systematically oppressed by an often violent ruling elite'.[650] Perhaps, as Pico Iyer observed, packaging nostalgia in this way is 'the ultimate Western luxury'.[651] After 2011, when power was handed over to a quasi-civilian government and international sanctions were eased, tourism was again encouraged. Aung San Suu Kyi had relaxed her position in 2009, and now encourages international visitors to her country.[652] Travel agencies and other commercial enterprises have sought to reawaken the West's romantic notions of Burma. Coffee table books, brochures, postcards, posters and websites are once again filled with images of golden pagodas, working elephants, emerald paddy fields, Buddhist monks and colourful locals. On one prize-winning poster in 2013, Burma was advertised as 'a land of golden temples and floating gardens'.[653]

Clearly, all these publicity campaigns have worked. The number of foreign visitors to Burma ballooned from 791,505 in 2010 to 4,364,101 in 2019.[654] During the same period, the hotel rooms available increased three-fold.[655] Despite the international backlash against the 'clearance operations' conducted against the Rohingyas in western Burma in 2016 and 2017, and the resumption of some international sanctions, Burma is still ranked as one of the world's fastest growing holiday destinations, with an increase of over 40% in tourist numbers in 2019.[656] According to official Burmese statistics, 76% of foreign visitors in 2018 were from Asia, but they too appear to have absorbed many of the romantic, idealised images about the country commonly found in the West. Doubtless with the encouragement of travel agencies and other entrepreneurs, not least the Burmese government, all these visitors are seeking the sights, sounds and experiences that they have come to associate with 'traditional' Burma, thanks to decades of exposure to the stereotypes found in the popular culture of Western countries.[657]

It is no coincidence that, in their content and presentation, the books, consumer goods and advertisements promoting Burma today mirror similar products released over 100 years ago.[658] The old stereotypes have been

given a new lease of life. Such representations of Burma, however, and their use in a popular context, still have the ability to raise sensitive issues, excite comment and cause controversy.

This was demonstrated in 1996, for example, when the eighth season of the popular US television series *Seinfeld* included two episodes in which the eccentric businessman J. Peterman, played by John O'Hurley, sought to recover from executive stress in Burma.[659] As Eleanor Hersey has pointed out, the choice of Burma for his escape was probably due in large part to the West's general ignorance of the country, its long struggle with imperial rule, and its continuing troubles.

> These historical contexts suggest that Seinfeld's humorous representation of Myanmar as the American man's retreat, the Buddhist temple in the midst of the jungle, denies the political realities of one of the world's poorest nations.[660]

Hersey concluded that Peterman's insistence on calling the country 'Burma' 'clearly reflects his nostalgia for the British empire and his refusal to acknowledge the political victory symbolized by the name Myanmar'.[661] Hersey could have added that, the obvious parodic elements aside, the reference to 'Myanmar' tapped into a bitter controversy over the arbitrary change of the country's name by the military government in 1989, a change that many foreign governments, international organisations and activist groups refused to accept for almost 20 years.[662]

In 2008, the movie *The Dark Knight*, a part of the Batman franchise, included a conversation between Bruce Wayne, who is secretly the 'caped crusader', and his British butler Alfred Pennyworth. Alfred, who apparently worked for the 'local' government in Burma many years earlier, recounted a story about a dacoit who for years eluded capture, robbing 'caravans', not for profit but simply because he wanted 'to watch the world burn'.[663] The only way the authorities eventually caught this dacoit was to 'burn the forest' in which he hid. Once again, Burma seems to have been chosen as the setting for this story because of its lack of familiarity to contemporary audiences and, partly as a consequence, its continuing air of mystery and romance. Alfred's British nationality was doubtless also a factor. It is perhaps worth noting that the story was cited by Thomas Friedman in a 2014 *New York Times* column to counsel against interventionist policies in Africa and the Middle East.[664] The same excerpt from the movie script was used by Tony Waters in 2020 to support an article about the Burmese government's brutal 'Four Cuts' counter-insurgency campaigns, which were aimed at isolating the country's ethnic guerrillas and other minority groups.[665] Neither Friedman nor Waters discussed the choice of Burma for Alfred's parable, but it was significant in both contexts.

To take one last example, in 2015 the actor Charles Dance recited Kipling's ballad 'Mandalay' at the 70th VJ Day commemoration ceremony in London. It was well received by diverse audiences.[666] This was two years before Boris Johnson landed in hot water for reciting the poem at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon. In 2019, Charles Dance recited the poem again, this time in the role of Lord Louis Mountbatten, in the Netflix series 'The Crown', again without adverse comment.[667] However, a plan to have the ballad sung at the BBC's celebration of the 75th anniversary of VJ Day in 2020 was dropped. The BBC refused to explain the reason for this decision, but it was reportedly because the designated singer, the Jamaican-born Willard White, deemed as offensive the ballad's reference to a Burma girl 'a-wastin' Christian kisses on an 'eathen idol's foot'.[668] One news story claimed that White also felt the ballad was 'derogatory to people of colour', while another stated that it was guilty of 'cultural superiority'.[669] The Burma Star Association, which since 1951 has represented the surviving Commonwealth veterans of the Burma campaign, lodged a protest on the grounds that Kipling's ballad was a favourite of the servicemen and women who had served there, and 'has intense emotional significance for them'. However, the Association's appeal for the ballad to be included in the ceremony was denied.[670]

These examples are small reminders of the continuing power of popular culture, even when traced back to the colonial era, and of the way that attitudes towards it can vary over time, in different contexts and between social groups.

10. Conclusion

> Put simply, Burma is an enigma, and the scholars who study this country and its traditions face great challenges.
>
> Ronald A. Morse
> *Glimpses of the White Elephant* (1987)

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars and commentators have turned their attention to the questions: how was colonial Asia perceived in and by the Western world, how did people in countries like Britain and the US form their views, and how were they manifested in terms of policies, public behaviour and material products? [671] To date, Burma has not been prominent in these studies, but it is starting to receive greater attention.

Historians have led the way, not only by informing Western audiences about developments in Burma but also by describing how European contacts over the centuries gave rise to a wide range of myths and misconceptions.[672] Other social scientists have made useful contributions. In 1985, for example, Josef Silverstein discussed the portrayal of Burma in several novels by European and American authors.[673] Clive Christie and Stephen Keck later surveyed the travel literature produced during the colonial period, and weighed its impact on Western perceptions of Burma.[674] Deborah Boyer searched through Victorian-era newspapers and periodicals for references to Burma and its role in the British Empire.[675] Jonathan Saha has looked at how animals affected British views of colonial Burma. This author has examined the way in which Burma had been represented in Hollywood movies and Western music, and how they might have influenced foreign views of the country.[676] Others have commented on the paintings of Burma and Burmese people produced by British artists during the colonial period.[677] There have also been a number of public exhibitions that have looked at engravings and photographs that have influenced the way in which Burma and other parts of Asia have been perceived in Western countries.[678]

It is clear from such studies that the most enduring mental pictures of a foreign country are formed not from a single source, but from the combination of many, often subtle, influences, accumulated over time. The perceptions of Burma formed in the West during the 19th and 20th centuries had their beginnings in the writings of earlier visitors and commentators. Also, while these notions were derived in part from high culture, such as art and literature, the diverse vehicles of popular culture were arguably more powerful vectors of ideas and images. For, despite their lowly status and often ephemeral nature, they were highly influential social artefacts that portrayed Burma and the Burmese people in ways that helped them become part of an imaginative inner world. Burma, and the 'Far East' more generally, was cast as 'a daydream realm of ahistorical, exotic, and erotic pleasures, locked away in a charming past that bears no immediate relation to the concerns of modern, progressive, real Europe'.[679] It was a highly distorted picture, at several levels. However, the very crudity and simplicity of the messages conveyed by movies, pulp fiction, comics, postcards, trading cards and other representations of popular culture helped to ensure their impact, and durability.

Also, the creation and consolidation of these pictures in the public mind has been a dynamic process. References made to particular aspects of Burma, either real or imagined, gave them a certain profile, but it was the constant repetition of such tropes that ensured their survival. Indeed, these overly-simplified, pre-packaged and archetypal images were usually presented in economical ways that almost guaranteed their absorption into the Western subconscious. Once established, they were then available for even wider distribution and exploitation. To paraphrase Edward Said, in his ground-breaking study *Orientalism*, first the vision was created, then it served the world conceived.[680] Burma features less in popular culture these days, but it is still the subject of countless stories and pictorial reports. Some bear little relation to reality, but they have reinforced many of the old clichés,

the most recent of which is that of an otherwise idyllic country torn between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. For many foreign observers, this competition has taken on a special significance. The romantic picture of Burma that resides in the popular imagination of the West has come to represent the ideal of what Burma could become under a truly democratic government that observes international legal principles.

Aung San Suu Kyi is now formally in power, but the country still suffers from a wide range of 'fiendishly complex' political, economic and social problems that seem to defy solution.[681] Burma has also fallen foul of the international community once again, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate being obliged in 2019 to defend her government in the International Court of Justice against charges of genocide.[682] Also, while Western (and other) entrepreneurs still speak of 'shaking the pagoda tree' and exploiting Burma's natural riches, as the British did before them, they face formidable political, structural and bureaucratic obstacles.[683] Yet, for all these issues, the country stubbornly clings to its more romantic image, helped by the growing number of travelogues, memoirs and photographic collections that are now being published by tourists and temporary residents.[684] Through such means, Burma seems destined to retain its air of mystery, and to continue weaving a magical spell on armchair travellers and others in the West who dream of remote and exotic places, populated by wild animals in lush jungles, and pretty girls sitting by golden pagodas. Perhaps, as the travel writer Paul Theroux has written;

> We are bewitched by visions of the faraway and the fantastic, because dreams of these Edens, of the overseas worlds of beauty and oddness and pleasure, seem to make life bearable.[685]

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Notes and references

1 The name of the then capital was officially changed (along with a number of other place names) in 1989.

2 The movie most often cited by visitors was the immensely popular 1957 film *The Bridge On the River Kwai*, starring Alec Guinness, William Holden and Jack Hawkins. This was despite the fact that the movie was based on a novel by the Frenchman Pierre Boulle and the plot was set mainly in Thailand. See *The Bridge On the River Kwai*, directed by David Lean (Horizon Pictures, 1957), *International Movie Database*, at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0050212/

3 Robert Booth, 'Boris Johnson caught on camera reciting Kipling in Myanmar temple', *The Guardian*, 30 September 2017, at https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/sep/30/boris-johnson-caught-on-camera-reciting-kipling-in-myanmar-temple. Also worth reading in this regard is Ian Jack, 'Boris Johnson was unwise to quote Kipling. But he wasn't praising empire', *The Guardian*, 7 October 2017, at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/07/boris-johnson-kipling-myanmar-mandalay-colonialism

4 Andrew Selth, 'Burma, Hollywood and the Politics of Entertainment', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, Vol.23, No.3, June 2009, pp.321-34; and Andrew Selth, *Burma, Kipling and Western Music: The Riff from Mandalay* (London: Routledge, 2019).

5 While 'Great Britain' is usually taken to refer only to England, Scotland and Wales, in this paper the term includes Ireland (until 1922) and Northern Ireland after that date.

6 See Andrew Selth, 'Burma after forty years: Still unlike any land you know', *Griffith Review*, 26 April 2016, at https://www.griffithreview.com/wp-content/uploads/Selth.Burma_.Essay_.Final_.set_.pdf

7 In 1989, the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council changed the name of the country (in English) from 'Burma' to 'Myanmar'. The new name was accepted by most countries and international organisations, but some governments, news media outlets and activist groups continued to use 'Burma' as a protest against the country's military regime. In 2016, State Counsellor and de facto national leader Aung San Suu Kyi stated that either name was acceptable. In this paper, the older name is used for editorial convenience, except where 'Myanmar' appears in formal titles and references.

8 This saying is often described as a quote by Einstein but, if true, its actual source is obscure. Variants have also been attributed to Aristotle and Socrates, among others.

9 For many years, the military regime and later the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party framed the West as a neo-colonialist threat. This is still a concern for some senior figures. See, for example, Htoo Thant, 'Former Myanmar leader U Thein Sein warns against neocolonialism', *Myanmar Times*, 7 January 2020, at https://www.mmtimes.com/news/former-myanmar-leader-u-thein-sein-warns-against-neocolonialism.html

10 Michael Hampe, *The Crafty Art of Opera*, translated by Chris Walton (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2016), at https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/crafty-art-of-opera/too-many-notes/A00D42E5F362E147362F718CF4F6747F#:~:text='Too%20many%20notes%2C%20dear%20Mozart,many%20as%20necessary%2C%20Your%20Majesty

11 Andrew Selth, *Colonial Burma and Popular Western Culture: An Exploratory Survey*, Working Paper No.197 (Hong Kong: Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong, 2020), at https://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc/Resources/Paper/20050716_197_WS_20200507_AndrewSelth.pdf.

12 Andrew Selth, *Making Myanmar: Colonial Burma and Popular Western Culture*, Research Paper (Brisbane: Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University, 2020), at https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0027/1075338/AS-Making-Myanmar-web.pdf

13 This term is taken from C.E. Calwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1906), which examines a number of these conflicts.

14 In 2011, the ruling State Peace and Development Council permitted the formation of a hybrid government with the national parliament consisting of both elected civilians and non-elected military officers. From 2016, the government was dominated by the National League for Democracy (NLD). Although she was not permitted by the 2008 constitution to become president, the NLD's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, became State Counsellor and de facto leader of the country.

15 Martin Smith with Annie Alsebrook, *Ethnic Groups in Burma: Development, Democracy and Human Rights* (London: Anti-Slavery International, 1994), p.17.

16 In this article, the 'white settler colonies' are taken to include Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. Arguably, the US could be included in this category, but is treated separately.

17 As Raymond Williams has written, 'Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language'. What exactly constitutes 'popular culture' is also the subject of considerable debate, but it typically includes mass-produced 'commercial culture'. By contrast, 'high culture' is usually the result of individual acts of creation. This differentiation has its weaknesses, but for the purposes of this paper it is useful as a working model. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.87; and John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.6.

18 Deborah Boyer, for example, has written that 'British public opinion about Burma … and Burmans, was shaped in large part through written and pictorial depictions in the Victorian press'. She appears to dismiss most other vehicles of popular culture as influences during this period. D.D. Boyer, 'Picturing the Other: Images of Burmans in Imperial Britain', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol.35, No.3, Fall 2002, p.214.

19 One problem faced by students of popular culture is that some of the most comprehensive collections of ephemera are in private hands. There are some notable exceptions, but few libraries or museums give such items a high priority for preservation. See, for example, W.M. Blick, 'Pulp Poets and Superhero Prophets: A Case for Popular Culture in Academic Library Collection Development', *Community and Junior College Libraries*, Vol.21, No.1-2, 2015, pp.5-10.

20 The majority of the photographs collected in modern coffee table books about Burma focus on iconic subjects like pagodas, Buddhist monks, ethnic groups in national dress, traditional festivals and the country's natural beauty. Very few include scenes of political, military or economic significance, although these would in some ways be more representative of contemporary Burmese society. Typical of this genre is Norman Lewis, et al, *Myanmar: Land of the Spirit* (Bangkok: Asia Books, 1996). One exception to the trend is James Mackay, *Abhaya: Burma's Fearlessness* (Bangkok: River Books, 2011).

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22 Burma regained its independence from Great Britain in January 1948, but the colonial period effectively ended with the government's retreat to India in 1942, to escape the invading Japanese and their Burmese nationalist allies.

23 'China-Burma-India', or CBI, was a US term, but is now widely used. It was not one of the recognised theatres of the war, however, since it extended geographically across the boundaries of India Command and of the Southeast Asia and China theatres. See Vice-Admiral the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, 1943-1945* (New Delhi: The English Book Store, 1960), p.7.

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25 K.M. Phillips, *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245-1510* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), pp.7-8.

26 The first recorded contact between Europe and Burma was the visit of the Venetian merchant, Nicolo di Conti, around 1435. However, Burma was known to the Greek geographer Ptolemy (possibly as 'Chryse') and was probably touched by Roman commercial agents on their way to China.

27 C.R. Boxer, *Joao de Barros: Portuguese Humanist and Historian of Asia*, Xavier Centre of Historical Research Studies Series No.1 (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1981), p.109. See also Joao de Barros, *Decadas da Asia*, 4 volumes (Lisbon: Germao Galherde et al, 1552-1615). The third volume of Barros' history, chapter 4 of which mentions Burma, was published by Joao da Barreira in 1563.

28 Cited in Carmen Nocentelli, *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia and the Making of Early Modern Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p.31.

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30 I.A. MacGregor, 'Some Aspects of Portuguese Historical Writing of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries on South East Asia', in D.G.E. Hall (ed), *Historians of South-East Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.184.

31 Nocentelli, *Empires of Love*, p.33.

32 It is not clear whether Marco Polo actually went to Burma (which he called 'Mien'), but he mentioned it (and 'towers' of gold and silver in the then capital of Pagan) in his *Travels*, which was written in 1298, the year after his return to Europe. See 'The Travels of Marco Polo the Venetian (1298)', *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, Vol.2, No.2, Autumn 2004, pp.91-9.
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40 Michael Symes, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, Sent by the Governor-General of India in the Year 1795* (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1800), p.217. See also D.G.E. Hall, *Early English Intercourse with Burma, 1587-1743, and the Tragedy of Negrais* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), p.100. In this paper, 'Burman' is taken to mean the *Bamar* ethnic majority, while 'Burmese' refers to the entire population. In some early writings, however, 'Burman' has been used to denote the latter.
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297 Browne, *The Coming of the Great Queen*, p.247.

298 Orwell, *Burmese Days*, p.41. See also Michael Mann, "'Torchbearers on the Path of Progress": Britain's Ideology of a "Moral and Material Progress" in India: An Introductory Essay', in Harald Fischer-Tine and Michael Mann (eds), *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (London: Anthem Press, 2004), pp.1-26.

299 Denis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience: From 1765 to the Present* (London: Harper and Collins, 1996), p.140.

300 Scott, *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information*, p.1.

301 Symes, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava*, p.vii.

302 'Burma: Opportunities for Trade; Rangoon Editor's Visit', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 September 1925. See also H.T. White, *A Civil Servant in Burma* (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), p.3; and J.G. Scott, *Burma: As It Was, As It Is, and As It Will Be* (London: George Redway, 1886), p.v.
303 Ian Brown, *Burma's Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.6-43.
304 Christie, 'British Literary Travellers in Southeast Asia in an Era of Colonial Retreat', pp.673-737.
305 Aldous Huxley, *Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), p.163.
306 H.G. Wells, *Travels of a Republican Radical in Search of Hot Water* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), p.84.
307 N.G. Cholmeley, 'The Oil Fields of Burma', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol.61, No.3, 156, 16 May 1913, p.639.
308 A.A. Lawson, *Life in the Burmese Jungle* (Lewes: The Book Guild Limited, 1983), pp.1 and 47.
309 Lewis, *Golden Earth*, pp.22-3.
310 Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p.351. The poem was of course 'Mandalay'. It is not known which short story Tinker had in mind but see George Webb, 'Kipling's Burma: A Literary and Historical Review: An Address to the Royal Society for Asian Affairs, 16 June 1983', *The Kipling Society*, at http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg_webb_burma.htm
311 See, for example, Sheridan Prasso, *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls and Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).
312 Rudyard Kipling, 'Mandalay', in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*, pp.418-20.
313 'Barrack Room Ballads, No.10', *The Scots Observer*, 21 June 1890, p.124.
314 Rudyard Kipling, *Barrack Room Ballads and Other Verses* (London: Methuen, 1892), pp.50-3.
315 Andrew Selth, 'Rudyard Kipling and "Mandalay"', *The Kipling Journal*, Vol.88, No.358, December 2014, pp.47-58. See also Andrew Selth, 'Kipling, "Mandalay" and Burma in the Popular Imagination', *The Journal of Burma Studies*, Vol.20, No.1, June 2016, pp.105-48.
316 'Mandalay Waltz', music by Bewicke Beverley (London: Weekes and Co., 1893).
317 'Zenobie: A Hindoo Love Song', words by Carroll Fleming and music by R.A. King (New York: Leo Feist and Co., 1904).
318 See, for example, 'Burma Maid', music by C.W. Ancliffe (London: Hawkes and Son, 1913).
319 'On the Road to Mandalay', words by Rudyard Kipling, music by Oley Speaks (Cincinnati: The John Church Company, 1907).
320 'Danse Birmane: Piano Solo', music by Maurice Yvain (Paris: Max Eschig, 1911).
321 'From Tokio to Mandalay', words by Joan Haudenschield and music by C.A. Grimm, (Chicago: General Music Sales, 1942). The only Burmese girls who danced naked or semi-naked in public were entertainers in establishments in Rangoon that catered almost exclusively to foreign men. See, for example, C.P. Mills, *A Strange War: Burma, India & Afghanistan, 1914-1919* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1988), pp.43-4.
322 See, for example, 'Burmah Girl', words and music by Paul A. Reubens, in *The Blue Moon*, by Howard Talbot and P.A. Reubens (New York: Chappell and Co., Ltd., 1905).
323 J.A. Westrup, *Purcell* (London: J.M. Dent, 1937), p.142.
324 See, for example, 'In a Burmese Setting: The New Musical Play at the Lyric Theatre: Scenes and Characters from "The Blue Moon"', *The Illustrated London News*, 2 September 1905, p.341.
325 As Goodall explained in his memoirs, he received detailed advice about Burma from Alice Hart and a British officer who had lived there for a period. See Frederick Goodall, *The Reminiscences of Frederick Goodall RA* (London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1902), pp.392-3.
326 Christian Gilberti, 'An Irish Painter in Burma: Sir Gerald Kelly', *Myanmore*, 4 March 2020, at https://www.myanmore.com/2020/03/an-irish-painter-in-burma-sir-gerald-kelly/
327 A *htamein* is a richer and more elaborate version of a Burmese woman's *longyi* (sarong).
328 Ma Theingi, 'Shan princess "returns" to Myanmar', *Myanmar Times*, 13-19 June 2011, at http://www.mmtimes.com/2011/timeout/579/timeout57901.html
329 Ma Theingi, 'Shan princess "returns" to Myanmar'.
330 Cited in Derek Hudson, *For Love of Painting: The Life of Sir Gerald Kelly* (London: Peter Davies, 1975), p.36.
331 C.T. Paske, *Life and Travel in Lower Burmah: A Retrospect* (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1892), p.45.
332 Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, p.200.

333 Pollock and Thom, *Wild Sports of Burma and Assam*, p.9.
334 Maung Htin Aung, 'George Orwell and Burma', *Asian Affairs*, Vol.1, No.1, 1970, p.21.
335 Kipling, 'Mandalay', in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*, pp.418-20.
336 Willis, *Western Men with Eastern Morals*, p.196.
337 *Sati* (or *suttee*) was the custom, outlawed in India by the British in 1829, which required widows to immolate themselves on their husband's funeral pyre. Ludovico de Varthema, writing around 1510, cited a case of 'widow burning' in the Tenasserim region of Burma, but it is not clear that the woman involved was Burmese. In any case, he added that the practice was rare. See Phillips, *Before Orientalism*, p.120. *Purdah*, from the Persian for 'curtain', was the religious and social practice of female seclusion common among Muslim communities. This took the forms both of physical isolation and the adoption of clothes that concealed the female face and form.
338 Knowles, *Memoir of Ann H. Judson*, p.111. Judson went on to say, however, that 'they treat the women as an inferior order of beings'.
339 Forbes, *British Burma and its People,* p.55.
340 Shway Yoe [J.G. Scott], *The Burman*, p.52. Burmese women were granted the vote in 1922. In Britain, most women over 30 were granted the right to vote in 1918, but full women's suffrage was not achieved until 1928.
341 Hart, *Picturesque Burma*, p.135.
342 Ibid.
343 Chie Ikeya, 'The "Traditional" High Status of Women in Burma: A Historical Reconsideration', *The Journal of Burma Studies*, Vol.10, 2005/2006, pp.51-82. See also, Grant Brown, *Burma As I Saw It*, p.53.
344 Shway Yoe [J.G. Scott], *The Burman*, p.61.
345 Gascoigne, *Among Pagodas and Fair Ladies*, p.43.
346 Rudyard Kipling, 'Georgie Porgie', in *Life's Handicap: Being Stories of Mine Own People* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), pp.331-2.
347 Alleyne Ireland, *The Province of Burma* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1907), Vol.1, pp.61-2.
348 W.G. Burchett, *Democracy with a Tommy-Gun* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1946), p.28.
349 F. Tennyson Jesse, *The Lacquer Lady* (London: Virago, 1979), p.65.
350 Lucy Delap, 'Uneven Orientalisms: Burmese Women and the Feminist Imagination', *Gender and History*, Vol.24, No.2, August 2012, p.392.
351 Delap, 'Uneven Orientalisms', p.396.
352 H. Fielding Hall, *A People at School* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1906), p.27.
353 Delap, 'Uneven Orientalisms, p.392.
354 See, for example, Lalita Hingkanonta Hanwong, *Policing in Colonial Burma* (Chiang Mai: Centre for ASEAN Studies, Chiang Mai University, 2015), pp.35-67.
355 Douglas Kerr, *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), p.2.
356 Hall, *A People at School.* Hall spent 25 years in India and Burma, mostly in Burma.
357 Elizabeth Cooper, *The Harim and the Purdah: Studies of Oriental Women* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1915), p.198; and Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, p.205.
358 E.C. Browne, *The Coming of the Great Queen: A Narrative of the Acquisition of Burma* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1888), p.287.
359 Gascoigne, *Among Pagodas and Fair Ladies*, p.56.
360 Miln, *When We Were Strolling Players in the East*, p.93.
361 'Ma Hla-Byn (Miss Pretty and Fair)', postcard by Raphael Tuck and Sons, London, c.1905, *Paper Jewels*, at https://www.paperjewels.org/postcard/ma-hla-byn-miss-pretty-and-fair
362 Mitton, *A Bachelor Girl in Burma*, p.52.
363 Willis, *Western Men with Eastern Morals*, p.101.
364 Wong Hong Suen, 'Picturing Burma: Felice Beato's Photographs of Burma, 1886-1905', *History of Photography*, Vol.32, No.1, pp.1-26; and Olga Tsara, 'Linnaeus Tripe's Views of Burma', *The La Trobe Journal*, Issue 79, Autumn 2007, pp.55-65.
365 John Falconer, 'Photography and ethnography in the colonial period in Burma', in Dell, *Burma: Frontier Photographs*, pp.35-6.
366 See, for example, 'A Burmese Princess', postcard by D.A. Ahuja, No.18, c.1910.
367 See, for example, 'Burmese Beauty', postcard by D.A. Ahuja, No.18, c.1910.

368 'Civilisation', postcard No.459 by D.A. Ahuja, Rangoon, c.1915.
369 A useful selection of photographs and postcards was included in Carmin Berchiolly, 'Capturing Burma: Reactivating Colonial Photographic Images Through the British Raj's Gaze', a thesis submitted to the Graduate School, School of Art and Design, Northern Illinois University, De Kalb, for the degree of Master of Arts, May 2018.
370 See, for example, Mallek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Alloula makes the point that many of the 'native' girls depicted in risqué French postcards around this time were orphans and prostitutes paid to pose for the photographer.
371 Paul Edmonds, *Peacocks and Pagodas* (New York: Dutton and Co., 1925), p.32.
372 'S.W. Monsoon Gale', postcard No.460 by D.A. Ahuja, Rangoon, c.1910. 'Gale', or *galay*, means 'young', in this case a young girl (*min galay*). See also Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, p.52; and 'Burma Postcards', *Chasing Chinthes*, at http://www.chasingchinthes.com/
373 Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, Vol.2, p.50.
374 W.H. Marshall, *Four Years in Burmah* (London: Charles J. Skeet, 1860), Vol.1, p.119.
375 Scott wrote that the traditional female 'skirt' had an opening at the front. 'Thus at every step the girl shows an amount of leg extending above the knee. This attracted so much attention from foreigners that practically all town girls now wear a skirt, which is sewn up like the Malay *sarong*'. Scott, *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information*, pp.90-1. See also B.W. Andaya, 'From Temporary Wife to Prostitute: Sexuality and Economic Change in Early Modern Southeast Asia', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.9, No.4, Winter 1998, pp.21-2.
376 It is interesting to note the controversy in Burma in the early 20th century over the introduction of *eingyi-pa*, or sheer muslin blouses for women, which exposed the corset-like bodice worn underneath. The adoption of Westernised clothes by women was criticised for being unpatriotic, as much as for their supposed immodesty. See Chie Ikeya, 'The Modern Burmese Woman and the Politics of Fashion in Colonial Burma', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.67, No.4, November 2008, pp.1277-1308.
377 Burmese fashion changed over time, but mainly among the urban and wealthier classes. This was not a luxury available to poorer people, or those whose dress needed to permit physical labour. See Georg Noack, *Local Traditions, Global Modernities: Dress, Identity and the Creation of Public Self-Images in Contemporary Urban Myanmar* (Berlin: RegioSpectra, 2011), pp.43-84.
378 'Self-admiration', D.A. Ahuja postcard No.401, c.1910.
379 Marshall, *Four Years in Burmah*, Vol.1, p.118.
380 See, for example 'Wild Tribes - Upper Burma', D.A. Ahuja postcard No.157, c.1910; and 'Andamanese "Belles", Port Blair', Issued by the Port Blair Corporation, Estate Agents, c.1930.
381 Scott, *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information*, p.139. The phrase is taken from a poem called 'The Piccaninny' by James Brunton Stephens.
382 Willem van Schendel, 'A Politics of Nudity: Photographs of the "Naked Mru" of Bangladesh', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.36, No.2, May 2002, p.353. The Mru are found mainly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, but some live across the border in Burma.
383 See, for example, R.K. Diran, *The Vanishing Tribes of Burma* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997).
384 R.B. Thurber, *In the Land of Pagodas* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1921), p.80.
385 F.T. Pollok, *Sport in British Burmah, Assam and the Cassyah and Jyntiah Hills* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), p.11.
386 Pollok, *Sport in British Burmah, Assam and the Cassyah and Jyntiah Hills*, p.11.
387 David Gilmour, *The British in India: Three Centuries of Ambition and Experience* (London: Penguin, 2018), p.292.
388 David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), p.285.
389 Ronald Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.382-5.
390 George Orwell, Review of C.V. Warren, *Burmese Interlude* (London: Skeffington and Son, 1937), in *The Listener*, 12 January 1938.
391 Willis, *Western Men with Eastern Morals*, p.99.

392 Cited in Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793-1905* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p.146. See also Nalin Jayasena, *Contested Masculinities: Crises in Colonial Male Identity from Joseph Conrad to Satyajit Ray* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp.117-9.

393 Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj*, pp.144-59.

394 To some colonial officials, alternative outlets for sexual impulses, such as homosexuality and prostitution, posed a greater danger to the moral and physical health of young men posted to Burma than those posed by local mistresses.

395 *Public Prostitution in Rangoon: Report to the Association for Social and Moral Hygiene on Brothel-keeping, Prostitution, Segregation and Immoral Conditions in Rangoon and other Towns and Stations in Burma* (London: Association for Social and Moral Hygiene, 1916), p.10.

396 Cited in Penny Edwards, 'Half-cast: Staging race in British Burma', *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol.5, No.3, 2002, p.285.

397 Kipling, 'Georgie Porgie', in *Life's Handicap*, pp. 328-39.

398 W.S. Maugham, 'Masterson', in W. Somerset Maugham, *Collected Short Stories, Volume 4* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp.260-8.

399 Frank Harris, *My Life and Loves*, edited with an introduction by John F. Gallagher (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p.896. The fifth volume of Harris's autobiography, first published in 1954, was largely ghost-written by the editor Alexander Trocchi. However, this particular passage appears genuine. See also Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire*, p.38.

400 Jesse, *The Lacquer Lady*, p.65. See also Bhupal Singh, *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* (London: Curzon Press, 1975), p.267.

401 Pablo Neruda was posted to Rangoon in 1927 as the Honorary Consul for Chile. Fearing that he would abandon her (which he eventually did), his Burmese mistress threatened him with a knife — and inspired the poem 'Tango del viudo' ('Widower's Tango') in 1928. See Seamus Martov, 'Neruda's Burmese Days', *The Irrawaddy*, 15 June 2015, at https://www.irrawaddy.com/culture/nerudas-burmese-days.html

402 H.E. Bates, *The Jacaranda Tree* (London: Michael Joseph, 1949); and Ethel Mannin, *The Living Lotus* (London: Jarrold's, 1956). Bates spent time in Burma and India in 1945. Mannin toured Burma in 1954, as recounted in *Land of the Crested Lion*.

403 See, for example, Gordon Howson, *Collecting Cigarette and Trade Cards* (London: New Cavendish Books, 1995), pp.14-15.

404 See, for example, Saowapha Viravong, 'Thai cigarette cards', *New Mandala*, 20 September 2012, at https://www.newmandala.org/thai-cigarette-cards/

405 Andrew Selth, 'Colonial Burma, as seen through collectible cards', *Nikkei Asian Review*, 11 March 2016, at https://asia.nikkei.com/NAR/Articles/Andrew-Selth-Colonial-Burma-as-seen-through-collectible-cards

406 'Burmese Girl', trade card by McLaughlin's XXXX Coffee, Chicago, c.1880; and 'Devotees throwing themselves beneath the white elephant's feet', trade card by McLaughlin's XXXX Coffee, Chicago, c.1880. In Burma, people have never thrown themselves under the feet of sacred elephants, although it was said that, when he took the throne in 1879, King Thibaw executed many of his relatives and rivals by sewing them in red velvet sacks and having them trampled to death by elephants. Morgan, *Fire and Blood*, p.81.

407 The cards purported to depict a dance in the royal palace, a 'butterfly' dance, a street market, a Karen funeral, a Kachin village and Burmese worshipping *nats* (animist spirits). English, French, German and Italian language versions of this set of cards were produced, all in 1909. In 1888, Liebig also issued a card depicting a Burmese war canoe, as part of another series.

408 For more on this subject, see Andrew Selth, 'Foreigners, Fighting and Phaleristics: Military medals in British Burma', *Tea Circle*, 23 December 2019, at https://teacircleoxford.com/2019/12/23/foreigners-fighting-and-phaleristics-military-medals-in-british-burma/

409 'The Burma Rifles', Player's Cigarettes card, Military Uniforms of the British Empire Overseas series, No.41, 1938; and 'Native Constable, Burma', Cope's Cigarettes card, The World's Police series, No.17, 1937.

410 See, for example, 'Home of a Kachin Chief, Burmah', Player's Cigarettes card, British Empire series, No.37, 1904.

411 'A Burma Beauty', New England Confectionary Company card, in Strange People From Many Lands series, No.10, 1930; and 'Asiatische Schonheiten' ('Asian Beauties'), Salem-Bilder card, in Die Bunte Welt ('The Coloured World') series, No.235, 1932.

412 A Typhoo Tea card produced in 1933, for example, called Rangoon 'The City of the Golden Pagoda'. A card in the 'Ports of the World' series, produced by the Mills cigarette company around 1959, described the city as 'a strange blend of the ancient East and the modern West'.
413 See, for example, 'Kyaik-Ti-Yo Pagoda, Burma', W.D. and H.O. Wills cigarette card, 1926; and 'Sampan Pagoda', Sweetule Junior Service cigarette card, Wonders of the World series No.9, 1956.
414 'Burma', Diamantine trade card, 1910; and 'Rangoon', Gartmann trade card, No.405, c.1920.
415 'Burma', W.D. and H.O. Wills Capstan card, Flag Girls of All Nations series, No.1, 1908.
416 'Post Office, Rangoon', card by Hignett Brothers and Co., Interesting Buildings series No.36, 1905. Built in 1854, and boasting a beaux-arts iron portico, this building was badly damaged in the 1930 earthquake, forcing the move to its present location in the old Bulloch Brothers building, built in 1908.
417 See, for example, '1st Burmese War, 1824-6', Smith's "Regimental" Cigarettes card, 1906.
418 'Burmah', Recruit Little Cigars card, Types of Nations series, 1910. Around this time, about 6% of the Burmese population was from the Indian sub-continent (although it was closer to 56% in Rangoon). See B.R. Pearn, *The Indian in Burma* (Ledbury: Le Play House, for the Racial Relations Group, 1946), p.8.
419 See, for example, 'Dancing Girls of the World: Mandalay', cigarette card, William S. Kimball and Company, 1889; and 'Burma', cigarette card, Richard Lloyd's Cigarettes, London, 1900.
420 'Burmese', Ogden's card, Picturesque People of the Empire series No.8, 1927.
421 'Burma: Carriage and pair of oxen', Ogden's Cigarettes card, Modes of Conveyance series, No.7, 1927.
422 'Burma', Smith's Oriental Cigarettes, Races of Mankind series, 1900.
423 'Burmese', W.D. and H.O. Wills card, Picturesque People of the Empire series, No.8, 1927.
424 'Native Constable, Burma', 1937.
425 'Home of a Kachin Chief, Burmah'.
426 See, for example, J.R. Andrus, *Burmese Economic Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1948).
427 An amazed British public was told at the time that Burma's annual rice exports were sufficient to make 'thirty-two thousand million rice puddings'. Stephen Constantine, *Buy and Build: The Advertising Posters of the Empire Marketing Board* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1986), p.12.
428 M.V. Longmuir, *Oil in Burma: The Extraction of "Earth-Oil" to 1914* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001), pp.57-8.
429 'Rubies: Mines at Mogok, Burma', Ringer's Cigarettes card, Mining series No.40, 1916; and 'Rubies: Sorters at work, Burma', Ringer's Cigarettes card, Mining series, No.41, 1916.
430 'Rice growing', Godfrey Philips card, Empire Industries series, No.20, 1927; and 'Teak felling' Godfrey Philips card, Empire Industries series, No.18, 1927.
431 'Burma Teak', Typhoo Tea card, Important Industries of the British Empire series, No.9, 1938.
432 Constantine, *Buy and Build*, plates 27 and 28. See also the Manchester Art Gallery posts at https://www.flickr.com/photos/manchester_city_galleries/6812151439/in/album-72157629157311483/
433 The Bibby Line was founded in 1807. From 1890 it was the primary carrier of passengers and cargo between Britain and Burma. See E.W. Paget-Tomlinson, *Bibby Line: 175 Years of Achievement* (Liverpool: Bibby Line, 1982), pp.11-16.
434 See, for example, 'Henderson Line: Egypt, Sudan, Burma', pack of playing cards, c.1920; and 'P. Henderson & Co.'s Line, Liverpool to Egypt and Rangoon', postcard, c.1920. The first Henderson advertisement for an outward sailing to Burma appeared in *The Glasgow Herald* in February 1860. See Dorothy Laird, *Paddy Henderson: A History of the Scottish Shipping Firm P. Henderson and Company and other enterprises which sprang from their initiative and spirit of maritime adventure, 1834-1961*(Glasgow: George Outram and Company, 1961), pp.93ff.
435 "The Road to Mandalay", US Navy poster, 1931, at https://www.ebay.com/itm/203046775919
436 The British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) was created in 1939, when it inherited the Imperial Airways flying boat services to the British colonies in Asia and Africa. Imperial Airways' first flight from Britain to Singapore via Burma (with stops in Akyab and Rangoon) had taken place in 1930. It inaugurated a regular mail service from London to Rangoon in 1933. In 1952, BOAC was the first commercial airline to introduce passenger jets, prompting an advertising campaign that emphasised this mode of transport. A 'BOAC' poster titled 'Burma: Temples of Bagan', and depicting the Thatbyinnyu Temple in the ancient capital, is a modern production presented in a vintage style. See 'Vintage Travel Posters' by Eric Hwang, at https://www.travelwitheric.com/Travel/Vintage-Travel-Posters/

437 The latter was part of a series of posters produced by Pan Am in the 1960s, showing women from many different countries in national dress.
438 Q.R. Skrabec, *H.J. Heinz: A Biography* (London: MacFarland and Company, 2009), p.177.
439 'Heinz Mandalay Sauce – Colonizing Animals', *Pinterest*, at https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/545005992405393877/
440 Lizzie Collingham, *Curry: A Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2005), pp.149-50. See also C.A. Coppin and Jack High, *The Politics of Purity: Harvey Washington Wiley and the Origins of Federal Food Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp.156-7. The case against 'Mandalay Sauce' was eventually dropped.
441 Burma Sauce was immortalised on a collectible thimble made by the Fenton China Company of Stoke-on-Trent, complete with the product's famous slogan; 'The only sauce I dare give father'.
442 The change in popular tastes generated by the empire is the main theme of Collingham, *Curry*.
443 Mona Domosh, *American Commodities in an Age of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.174.
444 Kipling, 'Mandalay', in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*, pp.418-20.
445 Saha, 'Condiments of Colonialism'.
446 These distinctive colours were created using uranium oxide, often with a tincture of gold added. The surface was finished with acid to give it a satin look.
447 See Robert Reed, 'The Beauty That Was Burmese Glass', at https://antiqueshoppefl.com/archives/rreed/burmese.htm. Since 1970, this style has been reproduced by the Fenton Art Glass Company in Britain. See Debbie and Randy Coe, *Fenton Burmese Glass* (Atglen: Schiffer Publishing, 2004).
448 See, for example, 'Maison Burma', at https://en.bijouxburma.com/pages/history
449 T.A.B. Corley, *A History of the Burmah Oil Company, 1886-1924* (London: Heinemann, 1983); and T.A.B. Corley, *A History of the Burmah Oil Company, Volume II, 1924-1966* (London: Heinemann, 1988).
450 The first figurine, in the 'Children of all Nations' series, has been variously labelled 'Burmah', 'Burma boy' and 'Burman'. The Royal Worcester catalogue number is 3068. The 'Burmese Lady' by Bossons was made in 1958.
451 The boy wore a *longyi* (tied incorrectly), while the lady wore a kind of multi-tiered *magaik* crown.
452 Frank Rowsome, *The Verse by the Side of the Road: The Story of the Burma-Shave Signs and Jingles* (Brattleboro: Stephen Greene Press, 1966), p.12.
453 Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, p.27.
454 Ibid. See also Janet Aldis, *Love and Sunshine in the East* (London: Herbert Joseph, 1930), p.3.
455 Lewis, *Golden Earth*, p.81.
456 Each range had distinctive decorations, but most featured elaborate flower motifs, or scrolls. Royal Albert's 'Mandalay' tableware featured a colourful butterfly. Sakura produced three lines in plain colours, under the names 'Mandalay Brown', 'Mandalay Moss' and 'Mandalay Blue'. In the 1960s, the British firm Broadhurst produced stoneware under the name 'Mandalay', decorated with stripes and geometric designs.
457 See, for example, 'A Lagoon in Rangoon: A Burmese Barcarolle', words and music by Val Valentine, banjo and ukulele arrangement by A.D. Keech (London: B. Feldman and Co., 1928); and 'Down in Old Rangoon', words by Wyn Ewart and music by Charles Prentice (London: Chappell and Co., 1923).
458 According to one source, Pontiac released a 'Rangoon Red' colour in 1958. See 'Pontiac Manufacturer Paint Colour Reference', *Unique Cars and Parts*, at https://www.uniquecarsandparts.com.au/manufacturer_color_pontiac. Between the 1930s and the 1970s, US manufacturers also produced 'Mandalay ivory', 'Mandalay blue', and 'Mandalay grey' automobile paints.
459 Frank Cundall (ed), *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1886), pp.32-3.
460 See, for example, Austin Kendall, 'The Participation of India and Burma in the British Empire Exhibition, 1924', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol.71, No.3689, 3 August 1923, p.654.
461 J.J. Flinn, *Official Guide to the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Columbian Guide Company, 1893), pp.131-2.
462 'Burmese Village at the Crystal Palace' *The Times*, 5 May 1896.
463 'Burmese Village at the Crystal Palace', *The Morning Post*, 5 May 1896.

464 See, for example, two cigarette cards titled 'Burma' by J.A. Pattreiouex, British Empire Exhibition series No.6 and No.28, 1929.
465 See, for example, 'Burma, British Empire Exhibition, Wembley', postcard by Photochrom, London and Tunbridge Wells, 1924; and 'British Empire Exhibition, Wembley: The Beautiful Carved Palace and Shrine', sepia photograph by Beagles Postcards, London, 1924.
466 'British Empire Exhibition', Raphael Tuck and Sons, Oilette Post Card No.3512, Series 2, London, 1924.
467 See 'British Empire Exhibition', *Pinterest*, at https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/222365300331501111/ https://www.google.com.au/search?q=1924+exhibition+burma+poster&tbm=isch&source=univ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5mseg5KfmAhXl4zgGHdchAZkQsAR6BAgKEAE&biw=1920&bih=1057
468 A *chinthe* is a stylised leogryph, or lion-like creature, almost always depicted in pairs, usually at the entrances to pagodas and monastery compounds.
469 'The Burmese Pavilion', cigarette card by Steven Mitchell and Son, Empire Exhibition, Glasgow, Scotland series, No.23, Linlithgow, 1938.
470 'Burmese at German Zoo', *Lost Footsteps*, at https://www.lostfootsteps.org/en/history/burmese-at-german-zoo
471 Anne Dreesbach, 'Colonial Exhibitions, "Volkerschauen" and the Display of the "Other"', *EGO*, European History Online, 3 May 2012, at http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/backgrounds/european-encounters/anne-dreesbach-colonial-exhibitions-voelkerschauen-and-the-display-of-the-other
472 Most of Marryat's collection had been acquired during his service as a Royal Navy officer in Burma during the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26). It included a 'royal throne', a state carriage, numerous Buddha images and a variety of Burmese weapons. See 'Collection online', *The British Museum*, at https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=251178&page=1&partId=1&searchText=Healer%20Buddha.
473 Ralph Isaacs, 'Captain Marryat's Burmese Collection and the Rath, or Burmese Imperial State Carriage', *Journal of the History of Collections*, Vol.17, No.1, 2005, pp.45-71; and Ralph Isaacs, 'Marryat's Burmese Curiosities: A second look', *Journal of the History of Collections*, Vol.22, No.1, 2010, pp.69-79.
474 Nicky Levell, *Oriental Visions: Exhibitions, Travel and Collecting in the Victorian Age* (London: The Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2000), p.273.
475 Levell, *Oriental Visions*, p.14.
476 The Burma exhibits at the Paris Exposition helped make up the India Section. They were later donated to the British Museum.
477 Alexandra Green, 'From India to Independence: The formation of the Burma collection at the British Museum', *Journal of the History of Collections*, Vol.28, No.3, 2016, p.455.
478 Taw Sein Ko, *Burmese Sketches* (Rangoon: British Burma Press, 1913), p.54; and 'The Burman: His Future', *The Indian World*, Vol.3, No.2, March 1906, p.135.
479 Green, 'From India to Independence', p.450.
480 The first recorded Burma-related donation was by one of the museum's founders, Hans Sloane, in 1753. It was a palm leaf manuscript. See Patricia Herbert, 'The making of a collection: Burmese manuscripts in the British Library', *The British Library Journal*, Vol.15, No.1, Spring 1989, p.59. The library of the British Museum became the British Library in 1973. Sloane also had 'a pigeon from Pegu' in his massive private collection. Presumably, this too ended up in the British Museum, although some of his stuffed specimens were in such a poor condition that they had to be destroyed. See James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane* (London: Penguin, 2018), p.212.
481 'Gold Treasures from the Burmese Regalia', cigarette card issued by W.A. and A.C. Churchman, in the Treasure Trove series, No.41, 1937.
482 Green, 'From India to Independence', p.457.
483 See, for example, Alexandra Green, 'The Formation of the Denison Collection of Burmese Art', in Alexandra Green (ed), *Eclectic Collecting: Art From Burma in the Denison Museum* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), pp.1-18.
484 See 'Art', Northern Illinois University, Centre for Burma Studies, at https://www.niu.edu/burma/collections/art/index.shtml

485 Kenton Clymer, *A Delicate Relationship: The United States and Burma/Myanmar Since 1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), pp.214-5 and p.230.
486 'Buddhist Art of Myanmar', *The Asia Society*, New York, at https://asiasociety.org/new-york/exhibitions/buddhist-art-myanmar. See also Sylvia Fraser-Lu and D.M. Stadtner (eds), *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* (New Haven and London: Asia Society Museum, and Yale University Press, 2015).
487 J.M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.101.
488 Levell, *Oriental Visions*, p.11.
489 Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p.100.
490 Most Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders fought in the air above, or seas surrounding, Burma, not in the land forces. Others were there as prisoners of war. See, for example, J.R.W. Gwynne-Timothy, *Burma Liberators: RCAF in SEAC*, 2 volumes (Toronto: Next Level Press, 1991); and *Australians on the Burma-Thailand Railway, 1942-43* (Canberra: Department of Veterans Affairs, Australian Government, 2003).
491 Frank McLynn, *The Burma Campaign: Disaster Into Triumph, 1942-45* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), p.1.
492 This is the main thesis, for example, of Louis Allen, *Burma: The Longest War, 1941-45* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1984).
493 Peter Burchett, 'Burma – Key to China?', *Maclean's*, 15 December 1943, p.9 and p.57.
494 The picture painted was not always accurate. For example, a calendar produced by the American Tar Company of Seattle in 1945 rightly claimed that 'Monsoons and Mandalay have brought fame to Burma, lush tropical country of Indo-China'. However, the accompanying illustration of 'A Temple in Burma', painted by the British water-colourist Noel Leaver, showed a structure unlike any found in that country. The same picture was used on an ink blotter produced by the US firm Brown and Bigelow in 1953. Again described as 'A Temple in Burma', it carried the caption 'Her petroleum, rice, forests, undeveloped resources assure Burma a strong position in Asia's destiny'. The caption at least was accurate. Leaver travelled widely in Europe and the Middle East, but does not appear ever to have gone to Burma.
495 Office of Public Relations, USF in IBT, Advance Section, APO 689, *Stilwell Road: Story of the Ledo Lifeline* (Calcutta: Indian Press, 1945), at http://www.cbi-theater.com/lifeline/Ledo_Lifeline.html This booklet was issued to soldiers working on the Ledo Road for their own information, but it could also be posted home to their families to help them understand the conditions under which the construction crews were working. See also S.W. Reiss (compiler), *From Burma With Love: Fifteen months of World War II letters between Irwin and Mary Reiss* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011), p.359.
496 *Pocket Guide to Burma* (London?: War Office?, 1945), p.5.
497 *Handbook of Burma and Northeastern India*, Informational Bulletin No.16 (New York: Arctic, Desert and Tropic Information Centre, Army Air Forces Tactical Centre, Training Aids Division, Office of the Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Training, Headquarters Army Air Forces, August 1944), p.22.
498 Slim, *Defeat Into Victory*, p.9.
499 Cited in Alan Jeffreys (ed), *The Jungle Survival Pocket Manual, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Casemate, 2017), p.5.
500 Slim, *Defeat Into Victory*, pp.117-8.
501 W.G. Burchett, *Wingate Adventure* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1944), p.8.
502 Cited in B.I. Koerner, *Now The Hell Will Start: One Soldier's Flight from the Greatest Manhunt of World War II* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), p.93.
503 George Forty, *XIV Army at War* (London: Ian Allen, 1982), p.69.
504 Eve Curie, *Journey Among Warriors* (New York: Halcyon House, 1943), p.303.
505 Clare Boothe, 'Burma Mission' (Part 1), *Life*, 15 June 1942, pp.100-3. The story contained several minor errors. Strictly speaking, Kipling was not a 'war correspondent', 'Magok' should be 'Mogok', and Burmese girls do not usually wear anklets (although Indian girls do).
506 Aldis, *Love and Sunshine in the East*, p.9.
507 Andrew Selth, *Australia's Relations with Colonial Burma, 1886-1947*, Working Paper No.89 (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1994), p.9.

508 See, for example, the Geneva-based Edito-Services Card of Knowledge sets, printed in Italy in 1977 and released through mail subscription. There were about 1,700 cards in the Second World War set, including some two dozen or more relating to the war in the CBI theatre. These included 'Indian Troops in Burma: Three years of jungle warfare', which showed an Indian machine gun post in Mandalay, surrounded by pagodas. Another was 'The End in Burma: Last of the Japanese rounded up', showing Allied soldiers walking through a Burmese village with fixed bayonets. There was another titled 'Clearing Burma: Determined resistance by the Japanese', showing a British patrol creeping past a giant Buddha statue (selected from the author's collection).

509 The Burma Road ran from Lashio in northern Burma to Kunming in southern China. A road connecting it to Ledo in India, opened in January 1945, was called the Ledo Road. The combined highways were known as the Stilwell Road, after Joseph Stilwell, the US general appointed second-in-command of Southeast Asia Command in 1943.

510 See, for example, 'The Ledo Road', *Life*, 14 August 1944, pp.65-73 ; and J.B. Shupe, 'Transportation in the CBI Theatre of World War II', *China-Burma-India Theatre Lines of Communication*, 2006, at http://www.cbi-theater.com/transportation/transportation.html

511 See, for example, the cover of *The War Illustrated*, Vol.8, No.198, 19 January 1945. Westerners associated the *chinthe* with Burma long before then. See, for example, the matchbox labels produced by Sweden's Burma Match Company before the war. Andrew Selth, 'Colonial Burma, history and phillumeny', *New Mandala*, 24 May 2016, at https://www.newmandala.org/colonial-burma-history-and-phillumeny/

512 This subject is examined at length in Selth, *Burma, Kipling and Western Music*.

513 Anonymous, 'Down by Mandalay', in Martin Page (ed), *Kiss Me Goodnight, Sergeant Major: The Songs and Ballads of World War II* (London: Hart-Davis, 1973), p.169.

514 'Burma Road', music by Ray Terry and Nat Temple (London: Campbell Connelly and Co., 1945).

515 'Burma Road Blues', Roy Milton and his Solid Senders (Los Angeles: Hamp-Tone 104, 1945).

516 Wanda Burnett, 'Yank Meets Native', *The National Geographic Magazine*, Vol.88, No.1, July 1945, pp.105-28. The caption under the photo reads; 'Kachin youngsters from the hills of Burma were shy until our men produced the brightly coloured books. Now the youngsters are regular "funny fans"'.

517 See, for example, *Burma During the Japanese Occupation*, Vol.1 (Simla: Burma Intelligence Bureau, 1 October 1943), p.14.

518 Slim, *Defeat Into Victory*, p.116.

519 '"Too Few, Too Late": The Tragedy of Rangoon', *The War Illustrated*, Vol.5, No.125, 2 April 1942, p.581.

520 O.D. Gallagher, *Retreat in the East* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1942), pp.218-9.

521 Cited in Michael Charney, *A History of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.68.

522 Slim, *Defeat Into Victory*, p.116. See also Andrew Selth, 'Race and Resistance in Burma, 1942-1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.20, No.3, 1986, pp.483-507.

523 See, for example, *Forgotten Allies: The Search for Burma's Lost Heroes*, directed by Alex Bescoby (Grammar Productions, 2019), *International Movie Database*, at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11860798/.

524 Geoffrey Gorer, *Burmese Psychology* (Washington: US Office of War Information, 1943), p.35. These secondary sources included a number of books written by American missionaries.

525 Andrew Selth, 'Geoffrey Gorer and the Study of Burma's "Personality"', *The Journal of Burma Studies*, Vol.25, No.1, 2021 (forthcoming).

526 Peter Mandler, *Return from the Natives: How Margaret Mead Won the Second World War and Lost the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p.76.

527 The handbook included chapters titled 'Meet the People' and 'The Way of the Burmese' which made sweeping and simplistic statements about the character of the local population. *A Pocket Guide to Burma* (Washington: War and Navy Departments, April 1944), pp.8-17 and pp.20-23.

528 Geoffrey Gorer, *Burmese Personality* (New York: Institute of Intercultural Relations, 1943) (mimeographed).

529 See, for example, M.E. Spiro, 'Violence in Burmese History: A Psychocultural Explanation', in J.F. Short and M.E. Wolfgang (eds), *Collective Violence* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972), pp.186-91; and L.W. Pye, *Politics, Personality and Nation Building: Burma's Search for Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p.179.

530 Gorer interviewed three female American missionaries who had returned from Burma, for his monograph on the Burmese personality.
531 D.H. Price, *Anthropological Intelligence: The Deployment and Neglect of American Anthropology in the Second World War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp.76-7. See also 'Science Comes to Languages', *Fortune*, Vol.30, August 1944, pp.132-5.
532 W.F. Kimball (ed), *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, 3 volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Vol.1, *Alliance Emerging*, p.457. See also Robert Dalleck, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.327.
533 After unsuccessful talks with U Saw in London, the British sought US help in transporting him from Portugal to the Middle East, where he could be arrested. U Saw spent the remainder of the war in a prison camp in Uganda.
534 F.R. Dulles and G.E. Ridinger, 'The Anti-Colonial Policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.70, No.1, March 1955, pp.1-18.
535 Selth, 'Geoffrey Gorer and the Study of Burma's "Personality"'. See also A.L. Kroeber, *Anthropology: Race, Language, Culture, Psychology, Prehistory* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1948), p.589.
536 Josef Silverstein, 'Burma Through the Prism of Western Novels', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol.16, No.1, March 1985, p.129.
537 'Glossies' was the name commonly given to the more expensive magazines printed on thick, shiny paper, which was better suited to carry photographs and other illustrations. They were also known as 'slicks'. The 'pulps' were usually printed on cheap, low quality paper, hence their nickname.
538 The 'golden age' of comic books is usually taken to be from 1938 to 1956. This was followed by the so-called 'silver age', from 1956-1970. See Andrew Selth, 'Burma and the Comics, Part 1: Wars and rumours of wars', *New Mandala*, 9 August 2016, at http://www.newmandala.org/burma-comics-wars-rumors-wars/; and Andrew Selth, 'Burma and the Comics: Part 2: Heroines, heroes and villains', *New Mandala*, 10 August 2016, at http://www.newmandala.org/heroines-heroes-villains/.
539 Silverstein, 'Burma through the Prism of Western Novels', p.129.
540 See E.L. Rasor, *The China-Burma-India Campaign, 1931-45: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), pp. 86-8. Also useful is P.M. Herbert, *Burma*, World Bibliographical Series, Vol.132 (Oxford: Clio, 1991), pp.213-20.
541 The American Volunteer Group, known colloquially as the Flying Tigers due to the designs painted on their fighter aircraft, was a mercenary unit formed in 1941 with covert US government support to assist Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist regime. It was incorporated into the US Army Air Force in 1942. See, for example, Daniel Ford, *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and his American Volunteers, 1941-1942* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2007).
542 D.C. Eyre, *Foxes Have Holes* (London: Robert Hale, 1949); and T.T. Chamales, *Never So Few* (London: Allan Wingate, 1958).
543 Walter Baxter, *Look Down in Mercy* (London: Heinemann, 1951).
544 H.E. Bates, *The Purple Plain* (London: Michael Joseph, 1947); and Francis Clifford, *A Battle is Fought to be Won* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1960).
545 Michio Takeyama, *The Harp of Burma* (*Biruma no Tategoto*), translated by Howard Hibbert (Rutland: Tuttle, 1966). See also *The Burmese Harp*, directed by Kon Ichikawa (Nikkatsu, 1956), at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0049012/. Although he had never been to Burma, Takeyama managed to paint a convincing portrait of the country by speaking to veterans who had fought there. In 1956, a film by Kon Ichikawa based on the book won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, ensuring the wide distribution of both the film and the book in the West.
546 Silverstein, 'Burma Through the Prism of Western Novels', p.139.
547 The French also produced some war comics about Burma, such as 'Attaque en Birmanie' (Paris: Dupuis, 1977). However, the bulk came from Britain and the US. The French tended to favour graphic novels to portray Burma, as described in Andrew Selth, 'Graphic novels chart Myanmar's history', *Nikkei Asian Review*, 1 April 2018, at https://asia.nikkei.com/Life-Arts/Arts/Graphic-novels-chart-Myanmar-s-history.
548 R.W. Winks, 'The Sinister Oriental: Thriller Fiction and the Asian Scene', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol.19, No.2, Fall 1985, p.49. Gresham's law is a monetary principle that states 'bad money drives out good'.

549 J.H. Williams, 'Elephant Man from Burma', *Men*, Vol.3, No.10, October 1954, pp.83-97; Howard Apter, 'How Merrill's Brave Marauders Were Sold Down the River', *Male*, Vol.12, No.10, October 1962, pp.28-31; and Ben Giordano, '$16,000,000 in Rubies [and It's Still There!]', *Real Men*, Vol.8, No.3, April 1964, pp.28-9.
550 Farrington, J.W., 'Ordeal of the Silent Death', *Man's Conquest*, Vol.3, No.1, May 1957, p.29 and pp.44-7.
551 Leon Lazarus, 'Yank Who Led Burma's Nude Nymph Commandos', *For Men Only*, Vol.11, No.4, April 1964, p.20 and pp.48-53; and Rod Summers, as told to Jim Arthur, 'I Led the Air Borne Nymphs of Burma', *World of Men*, Vol.2, No.2, June 1964, pp.14-17 .
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553 George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (New York: Popular Library, 1952).
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555 E.S. Aarons, *Assignment Burma Girl* (London: Frederick Muller, 1962).
556 F. Van Wyck Mason, *Trouble in Burma* (New York: Pocket Books, 1963).
557 Charles De Verteuil, *The House of Bamboo* (London: Panther, 1962).
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560 'Chennault and his Flying Tigers', *Real Heroes*, No.7, November 1942. See also Jack Monk and Don Freeman, 'Buck Ryan: Spies in Burma', *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1944 to 28 June 1944.
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563 James Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p.130. See also John Wagner and Mike Western, *Darkie's Mob* (London: Titan Books, 2011).
564 'Stone of Blood', *Commando*, No.665, July 1972.
565 See, for example, 'Breakthrough on the Burma trail', *Commando Adventures*, No.1, June 1957; 'Battler Britton and the Burma Buccaneers', *Thriller Picture Library*, No.200, 1957; and 'Burma Patrol', *Combat Picture Library*, No.33, February 1961.
566 See, for example, 'Retreat from Burma', *Commando*, No.2258, February 1989; 'Chindit', *War Picture Library*, No.171, November 1962; and 'Burma Guerrilla', *Battle Picture Library*, No.981, October 1969.
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580 Philippe Francq and Jean Van Hamme, *Largo Wynch No.4: L'Heure du Tigre* (Brussels: Dupuis, 1997).
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585 *Ripley's Believe it or Not!*, No.3, January 1954.
586 *Ripley's Believe it or Not!* (Orlando: Ripley Entertainment Inc., 2004). As the magazine stated, the name was cited in *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, translated by Pe Maung Tin and G.H. Luce (Rangoon: Rangoon University Press, 1960), p.111. However, the chronicle did not specify that everyone had to use the king's formal name all the time.
587 'Balanced golden pagoda in Myanmar seemingly defies gravity', *Ripley's Believe it or Not*, 12 December 2016, at https://www.ripleys.com/weird-news/balanced-golden-boulder/
588 'The Disappearing Tradition of the Lai Tu Chin Tribe', *Ripley's Believe it or Not*, 16 August 2016, at https://www.ripleys.com/weird-news/lai-tu-chin-tribe/
589 *Ripley's Believe it or Not Stories for Guys* (Orlando: Ripley Entertainment Inc., 2012), p.210. See also Aung Zaw, 'The Censor Rules Burma's Motion Picture Industry', *The Irrawaddy*, March 2004, at https://www2.irrawaddy.com/article.php?art_id=926. The reasons for the ban are not clear but may have been related to the military government's concerns regarding the opposition National League for Democracy, whose flag was largely red and yellow.
590 These movies are listed in Andrew Selth, *Burma (Myanmar) Since the 1988 Uprising: A Select Bibliography*, 3rd edition (Brisbane: Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University, 2018), pp.162-3.
591 This is not to forget *Bridge on the River Kwai*, released in 1957. This film's association with the 'death railway' from Ban Pong in Thailand to Thanbyuzayat in Burma helped strengthen several myths about the war in the CBI theatre.
592 The Burmese star of *The Purple Plain* (Win Min Than, also known as Helga Johnston) became a pinup for many Western men, but was rated less highly by Western women after she told interviewers that she could not pursue an acting career because her first duty was to care for her husband. 'Win Min Than', *International Movie Database*, at http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0857008/bio.
593 *Never So Few* did, however, highlight the corruption of the Chiang Kai-shek regime, a problem largely ignored during the war, apparently for wider strategic reasons.
594 I.C. Jarvie, 'Fanning the Flames: Anti-American Reaction to "Objective Burma"', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.1, No.2, 1981, pp.117-37. The main cause for complaint was that the US seemed to be claiming that it effectively won the campaign in Burma, when in fact the Commonwealth forces bore the brunt of the fighting.
595 *Escape to Burma* has also gained notoriety for a scene in which the hero was whipped on the orders of a sadistic Shan *sawbwa* (prince). See Alvin Easter, *Lash!: The Hundred Great Scenes of Men Being Whipped in the Movies* (US: Xlibris, 2004), pp.80-2.
596 The 1948 and 1953 issues were typical. The latter included a1 kyat note (depicting rice boats on the Irrawaddy River), 5 kyat note (women spinning silk), 10 kyat note (elephants hauling teak) and 100 kyat note (farmers ploughing paddy fields). In 1958, a 20 kyat note was issued, showing women planting paddy.
597 For details, see O.W. Linzmayer, *The Banknote Book: Burma*, at https://banknotenews.com/?p=9099

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